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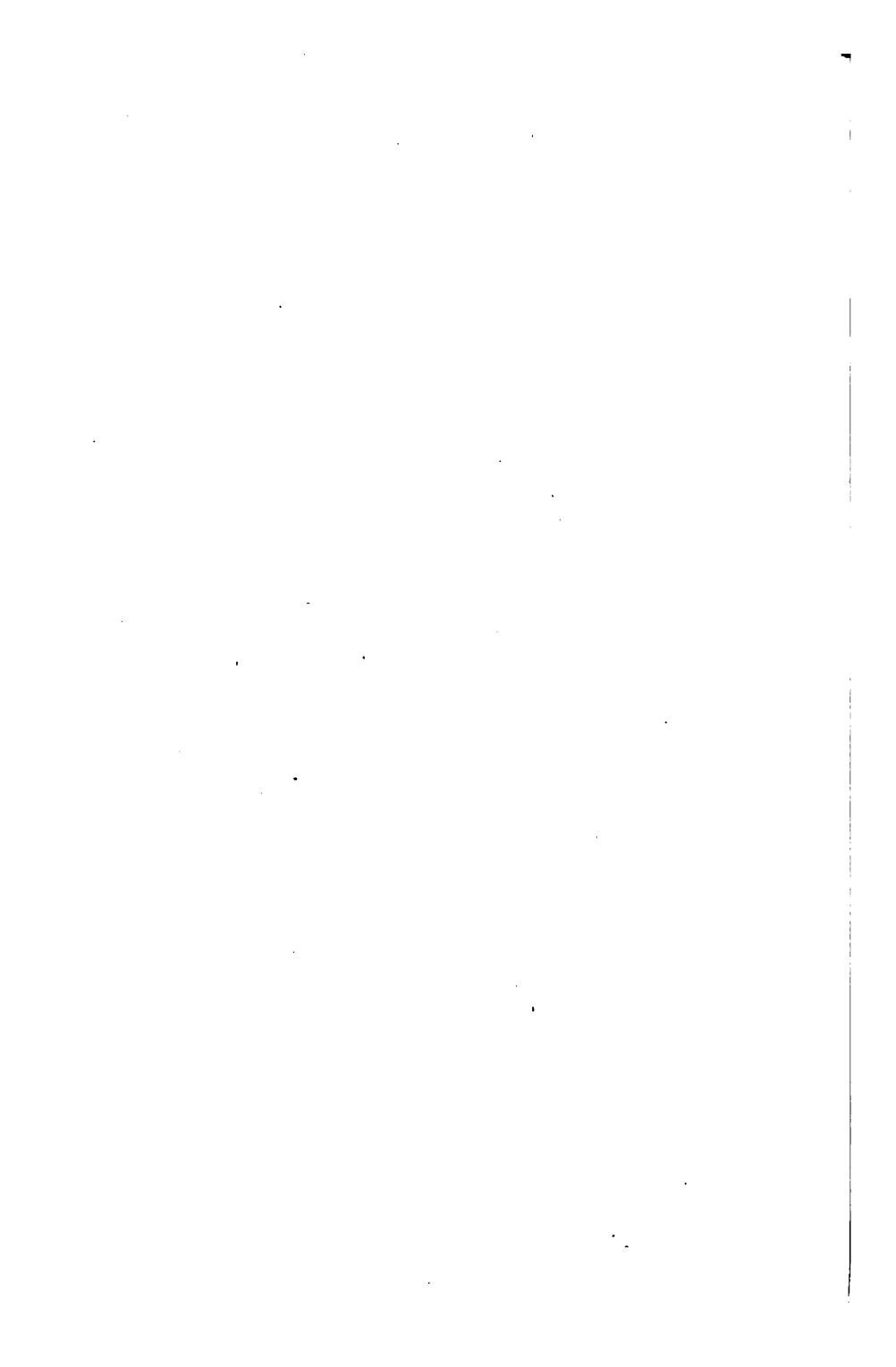




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MARRIED FOR MONEY.

"Aliquando præstat morte jungi, quam vitâ distrahi

VAL MAX.



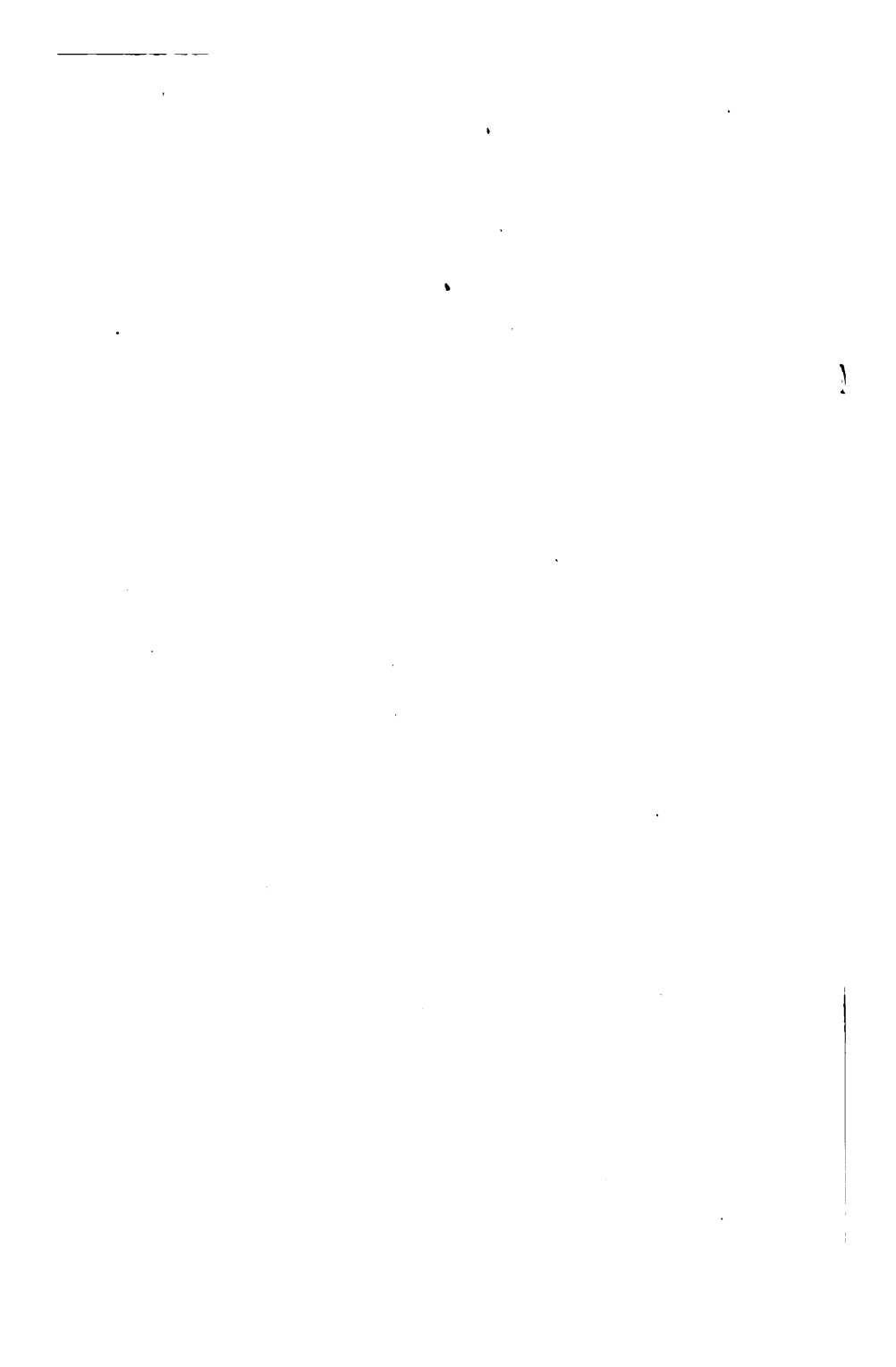
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MARRIED FOR MONEY.

CHAPTER I.

Res angusta domi.

THE curtains were drawn, the lamp was lit, and the little drawing-room of Nympton Vicarage looked its best, with no inquisitive daylight peeping and prying into every nook and corner, reminding one of the age, not to say shabbiness, of the furniture, and drawing one's attention to the faded colours of carpet and curtains.

Two people were seated near the fire—one, a clergyman, a man on the right side of fifty, but looking many years older: his hair was quite grey, and care, anxiety, and trouble had traced many lines on his intellectual and still handsome face. He had married very young, and on nothing, both he and his bride imagining that “the love they were so rich in would

certainly make a fire in the kitchen," and that all the other necessities of life would be provided for by the same magic power. It was useless for friends to remonstrate—the good advice of experience seldom has much influence in such cases. But the lovers very soon found how great a mistake they had made; expenses increased, and not the means to meet them; and, after years of anxiety, Mrs. Trevor, whose health had never been good, died, leaving her husband with five children, to the eldest of whom, a girl of about seventeen, we must now introduce our readers.

She was the only other occupant of the room, and was seated on a low stool at her father's feet, one arm thrown across his knees, and her cheek resting on it, while, with loving hand, he stroked the soft waves of her hair, which was of that uncommon colour—call it chestnut, or what you will—that in the shade looks dark, but wherever the slightest gleam of light caught it turned into the brightest gold—hair so lovely, and soft, and silky, that you longed to look at the face beneath to see if it were worthy of such a head. Mr. Trevor was the first to break silence. "I asked you to stay

with me, dear child, after the others were gone, that I might speak to you on a subject of some importance. Do you know what Sir William Chester came for to-day?"

A smile stole over the fair young face, and a look of mischief in the violet eyes, which a minute before had looked so pensive under the shade of their dark lashes.

"Had it anything to do with the crops, father, dear? He seemed much interested in them when I met him in Drawlingham the other day. The children told me he had come to see you on business, and you were not to be disturbed." And then, as if half ashamed of her seeming levity, she looked down, and her voice dropped, as she said,—“I think I do know, for he spoke to me yesterday, and I told him he might come to you—”

“Well, darling, if you really love him it is all right; but remember he is older than I am, and you are such a child still. He might almost be your grandfather.”

“He is so much the better fitted to act as ballast, which my respected parent says I so often require,” answered Nina, as she stretched one little hand up to stroke her father’s cheek.

"I never expected any one to be to me what you are, but then I shall be so very near at Rookwood. I shall come and see you nearly every day, and Sir William is so good and kind. I know I shall be happy. Besides, think how much I shall be able to do for the boys, and how rich I shall be. You will never have to think any more about those horrid bills, which I know worry your life out. Janet is quite old enough to take my place here, and she is so steady and thoughtful, that she will make you a much better housekeeper than I have done."

Mr. Trevor sighed wearily, and said,—“Well, dear, I shall miss you sadly; but, as you seem quite to have made up your mind, I suppose, when Sir William comes to-morrow, my answer is to be, ‘Yes!’”

“Of course it is, father, dear,” said the girl, rising and throwing her arms around his neck. “Good-night, and sweet dreams to you.”

“Good-night. God bless you, my child.”

For some minutes, Mr. Trevor sat gazing at the fire after his daughter had left. Presently rising, he began to pace up and down the room. “Oh, Helen, if you were only here!

It is so hard for a man to understand a girl's nature, they are such contradictory, unaccountable beings, and Nina's is no common character to be read at a glance. She seems in this case so fully to have made up her mind, that I do not like to interfere. God grant it may be for her happiness!"

In the mean time, Nina had gone to her room, which adjoined the one in which her sisters were quietly sleeping. Having set her candle on the dressing-table, she sat down, as she was rather fond of doing, to think, while she brushed the bright tresses, which, uncoiled, fell around her like a veil. Shakspeare says, there was never yet a fair woman who did not love to contemplate herself in the glass; but to-night Miss Nina was an exception to the rule, for, although seated before her mirror, she was sublimely unconscious of the lovely features reflected therein. She was far too much occupied with the events of the last few days, and her thoughts ran somewhat in this strain:—"I have read somewhere that all the troubles in this world are due either to want of love or want of money. Dear father, the former I have always been able to give you, and it shall

not be my fault if, for the future, you want either. 'Married for money,'—people will say so—it does not sound very nice; but I have not deceived Sir William. I told him I liked him, but did not love him; and if he is content to take me on those terms, surely I cannot be wrong when it will be such a good thing for dear papa and for all of them. It will be very nice, too, to be 'Lady Chester,' to have carriages and a horse of my own to ride, and a grand piano, and an organ, and I don't know how many nice things besides, and to be able to give as many presents as I like; to have no clothes to mend, and mend, and mend; and no more pinching and screwing, and contriving, which I do so hate. I dare say, too, that Sir William is right, and I shall get to love him after we are married; for do not wives always grow fond of their husbands when they are kind and good, as I know he will be? But there is papa going to bed, and I am not undressed yet. What a dreamer I am!"

CHAPTER II.

For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.

Hamlet, Act iii.

LET us glance at the family party assembled around the breakfast-table the next morning. On the side next the fire sat Mr. Trevor; at the head of the table, making coffee, was Nina, in a dress of plain grey stuff, blue ribbon round her neck and in her hair. To judge from her face, her rest had not been disturbed by the serious thoughts of the night before. On her left sat Janet, a girl of about a year younger, but such a contrast in every respect that it was difficult to imagine them sisters. While Nina resembled her mother, Janet had her father's dark hair, and thoughtful, rather sad, brown eyes. The characters of the two girls were as dissimilar as their faces,—the elder being all warmth and impulsiveness, while the younger was calm and reserved, and thoughtful beyond her years; but in spite of this difference of temperament, they loved and admired each other intensely.

Herbert and Johnny, aged respectively fourteen and twelve, were pickles, as boys of that age generally are, if they mean to turn into anything; little Elsie, the baby of the family, was a combined reflection of her sisters, with her saucy mouth, brown eyes, and fair, curly hair. Of course, every one spoiled her, from her father down to Jane the nurse, who had just entered the room, bringing in the morning's letters. She was a comfortable, middle-aged woman, with a cheerful, intelligent face, who had had charge of each of the family in turn, and who now shared the work of the house with one young servant, whom she kept in good order, as, indeed, she did everybody, for, like most old domestics, she was a perfect autocrat.

Mr. Trevor, after glancing at the post-marks, slowly opened his letters. The first was merely a summons to a clerical meeting, the second, after reading, he passed to Herbert, saying,—
“Here, my boy, this concerns you as much as any one.”

“What is it, papa? anything about a ship?” exclaimed Nina and Johnny in one breath.

“Yes, it is from my old friend, Captain

Stretton, to say he has got Herbert appointed to the Penelope. She is a flag-ship, and it will be a very good berth for him,—about the best he could have; but he must go to Portsmouth at once, and, I expect, sail for China in another month. Well, Herbert, what do you say to it?"

"I say Captain Stretton is a brick, father. I wish you could go to Portsmouth with me. He has actually asked me to stay at his house. How jolly 'twill be!"

"I suppose after this," said Mr. Trevor, rising, "you won't be very fit for lessons, so you needn't come into the study; I will let you off to-day. Oh, by-the-way, girls," coming back, "Sir William Chester, as Nina knows, is to be here this morning, and I think I must ask him to stay to luncheon."

"I *am* glad he's coming," said little Elsie, jumping off her chair, and running to the window to see if he were not already in sight. "I told him about poor old Gyp, and how Nina and I both cried when he died; and he said he would bring a little white doggy when he came again, with curls all over it like silk. Won't it be nice, sissy?"

Nina, glad to escape the questions of the

elder ones, followed the child to the window, and said,—“Yes, it will indeed, dear. But just look at all the snowdrops, how fast they are coming up. Shall we go and pick some for the vases? The flowers are looking so shabby.”

Elsie trotted off under Janet's escort in search of thick boots, while Nina went to consult with Jane about the luncheon, which was really their dinner. It was her daily worry, being naturally of a generous, almost lavish disposition; the small economies and petty details of housekeeping, with a slender purse, were particularly trying to her. We must do her the justice to say, though, that, however distasteful, her duties in this respect were most religiously performed, and her music, drawing, and books, always reserved, as a sort of treat, to be taken up later in the day. Janet, by her father's wish, still spent the mornings in study.

The garden, like the house, was a rambling, old-fashioned place. The Vicar's means did not allow him to keep a man regularly at work, or it might certainly have been more trim and neat, though, to my mind, not more

attractive than in its present half-wild state. It was a picture worth looking at on this sunny April morning. Some trees were already covered with the tender green of early spring, others still hiding their treasures till they could make sure that their enemy the frost, with his cold, cruel touch, would not appear again. Everywhere the beds were thick with bunches of crocuses and snowdrops, and here and there a primrose peeped from among its thick clusters of leaves; while flitting from bed to bed was Nina, closely followed by her little sister, holding the basket into which the flowers and leaves were dropped as soon as picked.

Presently Herbert and Johnny appeared. "I say, Nina, come out for a pull. Old Norman has lent us his boat, and we are just going to the beach. It is not so very cold, and, if you like, you may take an oar part of the time, to warm yourself. Trotty can come too."

"Oh, do, sissy," pleaded the young lady in question.

"I am not a bit afraid of the cold, and I should enjoy it immensely," said Nina; "but I am afraid I must go into the village. Papa

wants me to see old Mrs. James; she is ill again."

"Oh, what a nuisance. But I'll tell you what we can do, we'll come back to the landing-place for you in an hour, and we shall still have a good blow before dinner."

Nina, not unwilling to be out of the way, consented, and the boys ran off. To have seen her in the boat some two hours later, as light-hearted as a child, pulling, catching crabs, making Nep swim, and laughing at the shower-baths he gave them, her face flushed, and her eyes sparkling with excitement, you would have said it was a pity she should yet be burdened with life's more serious duties; and, to tell the truth, her own heart somewhat sank, as, on their return, they found their father and the baronet walking up and down the short drive between the gate and the house. The two men had been at the University together; but, although living for many years within twelve miles of each other, their acquaintance had never been renewed. Three weeks ago, Sir William had met Nina at the house of some friends she was visiting in Drawlingham, and he, whom the whole county had been planning

and making matches for during the last twenty years or more, no sooner saw this young girl, than, captivated by her beauty, he determined at all costs to make her his wife.

Byron said once, truly enough, that love, like the measles, was always more dangerous when it came late in life, and Sir William's was a case in point. Let us look at him as he hurries forward and presses Nina's hand, for the moment utterly oblivious of any other presence. He is a stout, but, on the whole, well-built man, of about fifty, with a good-natured, but certainly not a clever face; rather weak in the point of whiskers, but making up for their lack by a huge moustache. He looks every inch a gentleman; but still there is something incongruous in the idea of his being the husband of the fair young creature at his side. *He* evidently does not think so, for as they walk towards the house, he looks thoroughly well satisfied with himself and with his morning's work.

Elsie having run off in search of the dog, on which her affections were set, Mr. Trevor detained the boys to tell them the state of affairs; Janet had already been enlightened. Nina having

shown Sir William into the drawing-room, was about to make her escape, when he detained her, saying,—“Why are you in such a hurry to get away from me, dearest? If you knew how, ever since I saw you first, I have longed for this moment, you would not be so cruel. I know I cannot expect you yet to feel as I do, but you will try to love me, darling? Promise me that once more.”

She answered, in a low tone,—“Yes, Sir William,”—and allowed him to kiss her, but immediately after hurried away.

Janet met her in her room. “My dear Nina, why did you not tell me before about Sir William Chester?”

“I thought of doing so once or twice, but, you see, nothing has been really settled until to-day, dear.”

“Fancy you the mistress of Rookwood! It seems so sudden and strange, I can scarcely realize it. But are you happy, Nina?”

“Well, that is an extraordinary question to ask. Don’t you think I should be a very ungrateful girl if I were not? Think how nice it will be when you come and stay with me. I mean to have plenty of visitors, and

all sorts of gaiety; so you must be prepared to be shaken out of that mantle of reserve you are so fond of wrapping yourself up in. But there's the bell; you run down, dear, I'll follow you in a minute."

"To be wise, and love, exceeds man's might;" and Sir William, though not usually wanting in plain common-sense, failed signally in his efforts to discuss politics with his host. His eyes were continually turning in the opposite direction; and when Nina, whose liveliness could not long be restrained, tried to rally him, it produced not the slightest rebound. Under the circumstances, it was a relief when luncheon was over. The gentlemen being left alone, Sir William somewhat recovered; but still he could talk of nothing but the improvements to be made at Rookwood in preparation for his bride; and he ended by begging Mr. Trevor to bring both his daughters to stay, that he might have the help of their taste. His sister-in-law, Mrs. Chester, who lived with him, would, he knew, be delighted to see them, for "who could help loving Nina?" &c.

CHAPTER III.

Come and see my ship, my darling,
On the morrow, said the King.

THE SAGA OF KING OLAF.

THE carriage came for them the next day at three o'clock, and in it Sir William, whose impatience would not allow him to remain behind. Nothing could be more lovely than the drive from Nympton to Rookwood Manor; first, through the village and up a steep hill, then for miles across a common overlooking the sea, and dotted here and there with huge grey rocks frowning down, and appearing, on this bright spring day, as if they were chiding the rest of nature for being so smiling and gay.

The two gentlemen talked at first, as every one does, of the weather, then about the fishing, and from thence glided off to boating and boat-racing, and the Oxford and Cambridge races in particular. Mr. Trevor had, in his day, been one of the University eight, and he became quite enthusiastic in talking of old times.

The minutes passed so fast, that when they at length reached the lodge, it seemed scarcely to be realized that but half-a-mile remained of the twelve which separated Nina's present from her future home. As they drove towards the house, Sir William was greatly pleased at the expressions of delight which broke from both the girls at the beauty of the park, with its fine old trees, its deer, and the peeps which they here and there caught of the river winding its lazy way along, as if loth to leave a spot so full of attraction.

In the hall they were met by Mrs. Chester—a tall, dignified woman, of about forty, with a somewhat precise manner, and a resigned expression of countenance. Don't run away with the idea that the lady in question was ever so sinful as to feel discontented; by no means; her whole spirit was one of thankfulness—thankfulness that she was not as other men and women. Probably, on your first acquaintance, if you were inclined to be credulous, and to take people at their own valuation, you would consider Mrs. Chester an angel of light; but if you had any penetration, you would not know her long before

coming to the conclusion that to be a ministering spirit it would be necessary to have a few more thoughts for others, and a few less for herself, than she seemed to possess. But this is anticipating. Mrs. Chester took the girls, who were rather in awe of her, to their rooms, which adjoined each other; she then left them, hoping they would manage to amuse themselves till dinner, as she had some duties to attend to which would not be put off.

"To talk of sermons in stones," said Nina, as the door closed, "if ever I saw a sermon in a face, there is one. My dear Janet, you may look reprovingly at me, but I can see already that Mrs. Chester is the sort of person I could easily have too much of—one of those disagreeable people who think, if the world is not cut after their pattern, it assuredly must be wrong."

"What an unreasonable, prejudiced piece of goods you are, Nina. How can you judge all that at first sight? I should have thought her so good."

"Oh, yes. The kind of goodness to make one, if one saw too much of it, almost hate

virtue itself, owing to the unpalatable way in which she exemplifies and serves it up. But," she continued, after a short pause, "I believe papa is right, and I am too hasty in forming an opinion. I wish, dear, I could be more like you, always thinking the best of every one."

"It is only because you are so much cleverer than I am, Nina, that it makes it harder for you not to say sharp things. I am sure you never really have an unkind thought of any one."

"Well, my dear, let us change the subject. We'll agree that it is Mrs. Chester's vocation, not only 'to point a moral,' but also 'to adorn a—' No, I'm afraid that quotation won't do, will it? By-the-way, it is almost time for us to think of adorning ourselves; so finish your tea, dear. It was, I must say, very thoughtful of Mrs. Chester to send us her maid; but I am glad,—are not you?—that I was able to get rid of her so gracefully."

You would have said these sisters were formed to set each other off in person as well as in character, had you seen them this evening in their simple white dresses. Janet's dark

braids, and regular, almost severe, features, relieved by scarlet geraniums, and here and there a bit of the same bright colour in her dress; while Nina looked, if possible, lovelier than ever in her favourite blue ribbons, turquoise brooch and earrings, and forget-me-nots in her hair, the bright wealth of which Janet took such pride in arranging in numerous coils and plaits, which seemed almost too heavy for hair-pins to hold.

Can you picture them? And shall I give you a background? Mrs. Chester makes a very good one in her stiff black silk, guiltless of crease or wrinkle to mar the straightness of its folds. She considered it a duty to set the world an example in dress as in other things; she never altered the style of it, and thought fashion-books an invention of the enemy. Nina contemplated her at dinner with some amusement; she ate in such a conscientious way, so very evidently only because it was a duty she owed to the food, to herself, and to society. In the intervals between the courses, she sat as if in *pose* for her photograph, with hands folded, and a face rendered sweet by a faint suspicion of a smile. She never talked much,

but, like patience on a pedestal of superiority, waited for an opportunity to say a word in season. The late Mr. Chester had been a meek, nervous man, strongly impressed by a sense of his inferiority to his wife. He died within a year after their marriage,—censorious people said, driven into his grave: they declared that such close contact with absolute perfection must end in distraction or death. If such were the case, Sir William's constitution must have been different from his brother's, as his sister-in-law had lived with him many years without any evil result. When he had announced to her the fact of his engagement, she had expressed no surprise. It was a part of her creed to be prepared for everything and astonished at nothing. What her private feelings on the subject were, it is not for us to inquire; anyway, she was wise enough to know that opposition would only make Sir William more determined, and that her most politic course was, in appearance, at least, to be contented with the change.

Not the least among the attractions of Rookwood, in Nina's eyes, was the music-room. Sir William himself was not musical, for I doubt if

he could have distinguished between 'Rory O'More' and the Dead March in 'Saul,' except by the pace at which they went. Neither organ nor piano was often opened; and the huge volumes of Bach, Handel, Beethoven, and many another name equally famous, were rarely touched except by the housemaids. Nina's whole soul, on the contrary, was wrapped up in music; it was, with her, not a mere young-ladyish liking, but a passion. Neither she nor her sister had ever had a master; but their mother, who was no mean musician, had herself more than made up for this deficiency by the constant attention and pains she had given in cultivating the talent which had been visible at a very early age.

This evening Nina revelled in the luxury of a piano such as she had seldom the opportunity of playing on. The music-room was divided from the drawing-room simply by a curtain, which to-night was looped back. Sir William sat watching Nina as her hands wandered lovingly over the keys, loth to leave them, though she had played thing after thing, and Mrs. Chester had politely said "Thank you!" more than once, as though she thought it quite

time to give up. Sir William liked the music, because it was Nina who produced it, and because it seemed to give her such pleasure. "How delighted Charley will be," said he, at last, "when he comes with his fiddle, to find some one to accompany him. He and his violin are inseparable companions."

"Is that Mr. Chester, you speak of?" asked Mr. Trevor.

"Yes, my cousin—the next heir to the title. He is in the Guards, and is a good sort of young fellow. I wish, when he is here though, he would take a little more interest in the property. He is too fond, not only of music, but of books, for my taste, and spends hours in the library when he might be gaining really useful information. He ought to know something of farming—he has a small property of his own in Wales, but it is left entirely to the steward and bailiff; he merely goes down for the shooting. I shall be jealous of the piano soon," he said presently, rising and going to Nina's side. "So you really like it, dear?"

"I do indeed. I should think there are not many instruments so good. If, as you say,

you know nothing of music, how did you manage to make such a good choice?"

"Oh! that was one of Charley's freaks two years ago. Nothing would do but I must let him go to Broadwood's and select one, and that he was to have *carte blanche* as to the price. I thought at the time it was rather useless; but, as he said the house was not complete without it, I let him have his way. Now, I am glad myself; for anything that gives you, my darling, pleasure, must be a satisfaction to me."

"You are very good, Sir William," Nina answered. She felt so grateful for his devotion, and something so very like love shone in the eyes she raised to his, that his heart glowed as it had never done before, and he felt quite satisfied that, in having determined to make her his, he had taken a step which was for the happiness of both, and for the future he had no fears.

The days passed swiftly and pleasantly at Rookwood, and, ere they left, it had been settled that the wedding should take place in May, before Herbert left England; Sir William having seized that as a pretext for hurrying things.

Nina allowed herself to be drifted on, without stopping to analyse her own feelings. She was dazzled by the change in her future position undoubtedly, yet she could not help feeling now and then a sort of shrinking from her marriage; but she was young—not yet eighteen—and very inexperienced, and she believed that with the magic name of wife would grow all those feelings she strove in vain for now.

CHAPTER IV.

When I tell you, Mrs. Candour, that the lady they are abusing is a particular friend of mine, I hope you'll not take her part.

School for Scandal.

ON a dull afternoon, about a week after their return home, the two sisters were seated busily working, their hands being fully occupied just now in the manufacture of marvellous bits of finery to form part of the trousseau; for Nina, although she could not, like many girls, command an unlimited supply of silks, cambric, and lace, yet had, what was better, that is, the work of loving hands, and between her own

and her sister's good taste, and Jane's clever needle, she was able to make the most of the little money her father could allow her.

A visitor was announced, "Mrs. Nowall," a stout, florid-looking woman, of about fifty, handsomely, but showily, dressed, and with but little regard to taste or the harmony of colours. Colonel Stewart, the owner of Nympton Park, having died suddenly a few years previously, Mr. Nowall, a large Manchester manufacturer, had taken the place till the heir, now a boy, should be of age. There was little in common between the Trevors and these, their nearest neighbours. Money was with the Nowalls the test of people's claim to consideration, and they had not sufficient refinement or cultivation to appreciate these qualities in the Vicar and his daughters. The latter thought it their duty to be civil to people who, with all their faults, were really very good to the poor, and generous in the parish. Their want of tact and patronizing ways were, however, sometimes almost more than Mr. Trevor's keenly sensitive nature could endure. To-day the girls were glad their father was out of the way, for Mrs. Nowall had evidently called to find

out all she could about the coming marriage. She congratulated Nina on her good looks, as though she had expected to see a victim prepared for the sacrifice. She then said she was afraid Mr. Trevor could not be well—he had looked so pale on Sunday, and she had brought in the carriage a dozen of port—she was sure it would do him good, as it was very old and nourishing.

Nina flushed to the temples, and said politely, but rather stiffly,—“You are very good, Mrs. Nowall. I have no doubt my father will be very glad to have some to give to the poor people on Tyndale Common, there has been so much sickness there lately.”

Mrs. Nowall was about to reply, when Janet dexterously changed the subject—speaking of their visit to Rookwood. That happening to be the theme of all others interesting to Mrs. Nowall just at present, she fell into the trap, and began to make inquiries about the house and grounds, the number of servants kept, with many other questions equally impertinent, Nina thought. She became as frigid as was possible with her, but Mrs. Nowall was not to be repressed.

"Well, my dear, 'twill be a great change for you. I've always wondered Sir William Chester has not married before—he is getting up in years now. They said there was some cause for his bachelor's life which nobody *could* find out; but there's no need, to be sure, for me to tell you of it, and it must be all talk, of course—people *are* so ill-natured. And when is it to come off, my dear? Next month? You've not much time to think about it. And you, Miss Janet, are to be bridesmaid, of course?"

"Yes, with my little sister, and the two Misses Featherstone, from Drawlingham."

"Oh! the Misses Featherstone! I really wonder the eldest can bear to have her name coupled with young Norton's in the way it is. He is the most notorious flirt in the county, and has tried on the same game with I don't know how many girls, going as far as was possible without proposing, and when asked his intentions declaring he had none. Major Featherstone is far too mild to call him to account, but I expect he will find his match in Mrs. F.; about *her* strength of mind there can't be a doubt. The young man is well off

now, and has expectations from an uncle besides. So it would be a good match for either of her girls,—they have neither of them much beauty to boast of.”

And Mrs. Nowall seemed to expand as she contrasted them in her mind with her own fat, good-natured, and unaristocratic daughter, the pride and joy of both parents, who, if it had been possible, would have spoilt her long ago.

To the great relief of Nina and Janet, Mrs. Nowall at last looked at her watch, and the somewhat elderly easy-chair creaked out its satisfaction as she rose, saying,—“I must be going now, or John will begin wondering where I am, and perhaps accusing me of gossiping, or something of that sort; he is so full of his jokes. But you must come to luncheon some day soon. I have not been able to ask any one for a long time past; that new cook I got from Lady Freeman is not worth her salt, much less thirty pounds a year; you might as well throw away the money at once; for my part, I don’t know what servants are coming to, between dress, and evenings out, and perquisites, and a thousand other things they never thought of in my young

days,"—and Mrs. Nowall's silks rustled in indignant sympathy as she sailed, or rather tried to sail, towards the door, the result being something between a waddle and a shuffle.

Nina gave a sigh of relief as the carriage-wheels were heard rolling away. "Oh! how slowly the time went; I thought it would never take her off with it. I was so afraid papa might come in, and the wine subject be renewed. He is too polite to have answered as I did, and I know how Mrs. Nowall's vulgarity and want of tact jar upon him."

"She is certainly a most trying person," said Janet. "You always put on such a repressed look when she is here, that I am constantly fearing it will be too much for you, and that you will pop out something sarcastic, which will penetrate even her *amour propre*, substantial as it is. I think sometimes the air of Nympton Park must be very inflating, by the puffed-up condition of its inmates."

"Well done, Janet; even you are becoming severe; but you are quite right; I am sure 'Après nous le déluge' should be their motto. It is not Mrs. Nowall's pretension that I mind so much, though, annoying as it is; it is that

way she has of always leaving an unpleasant impression behind whatever she talks about. She says the most unkind things of people in such a seemingly good-natured way, that you can scarcely accuse her of being uncharitable, although you know she is doing no end of mischief. Such persons ought never to be allowed in society without being labelled 'dangerous.' Why one-half of the world should be suffered to go about setting on edge the teeth of the other half, I can't conceive; if I had my way, I would shut up all the disagreeable people as we do idiots or lunatics. I wonder how long it would take them to pick each other's characters to the bone?"

At this moment Jane entered with a note and a magnificent bunch of hot-house flowers, which, she said, a groom had just brought from Rookwood. I am sure Nina will not accuse us of committing a breach of confidence if we look over her shoulder as she reads the letter, as follows:—

"Do not think me odd, my dearest Nina, when I tell you that, as you read these lines, I shall be on my way to London. I wish I

could have seen you to say good-bye, but I have been called away suddenly on business, and have not a minute to spare. I shall try to see my Cousin Charles, to arrange with him about coming to me for *that* day, which, in making you mine, is to give me happiness such as I never dreamed of in past days. Good-bye till next week, my dearest (soon to be) wife. Ever-yours,

“ W. CHESTER.”

Why did Nina shudder at the word ‘wife’? She felt almost angry with herself for so doing at what she called her ingratitude, after all the proofs she was constantly receiving of his affection and thought for her. People are too apt to laugh at the theory of presentiments as the offspring of mere vulgar ignorance; but who can say how far the shadows of future clouds may reach? Have we not all at some period of our life, in the midst, perhaps, of mirth and gaiety, suddenly felt an inexplicable sadness, and a weight as if some sudden calamity was about to befall us? Is not this thrill, as of a minor chord vibrating through the music of our hearts, usually the precursor

of some unexpected disappointment, some unlooked for sorrow? But Nina was not long to be left to her own thoughts, whether sad or otherwise.

"Miss Nina, dear," it was Jane who spoke, "do come into the nursery and look at your blue silk; 'tis a picture; but some of them frills on the skirt don't set quite right, and I think I must alter them."

"I'll come now, Jane; it won't do to spoil Aunt Elizabeth's present for want of a little trouble."

Once in the nursery it was so difficult to get away, that Nina had barely time to change her dress before her father came. She always liked to be in the drawing-room to meet him when he got back from his parish work, weary and often dispirited.

At tea-time, the two girls gave their father a description of Mrs. Nowall's visit. Now it was over, they could afford to laugh at their afternoon's experience.

Mr. Trevor laughed with them, and said,—
"It is a good thing Mrs. Nowall does not live on your good graces, or she would very soon get far less imposing in size; but I met Major

Featherstone in Drawlingham this afternoon, and he tells me your friend Maud is going to marry young Norton, so there *was* a grain of wheat in Mrs. Nowall's bushel of chaff this time. Would you like to walk with me to Drawlingham to-morrow? I am going to see Archdeacon Soaper, and I could leave you at Major Featherstone's. I dare say you have plenty to discuss and arrange with Maud and Gertrude. Their father was going to drive them here this afternoon, but Mrs. Featherstone wanted the carriage, and, of course, *that* was conclusive."

CHAPTER V.

Hüte Dich vor den Katzen,
Die voraus lecken, hinter kratzen.

GERMAN PROVERB.

DRAWLINGHAM was a quaint old city, picturesquely situated, and most irregularly built, boasting few modern houses, and not a single terrace, square, or crescent; while the streets themselves were so narrow, that opposite neighbours might almost have shaken hands

across from the projecting upper windows, and you wondered how vehicles ever managed to pass each other. Drawlingham society was no exception to that of other cathedral towns, strictly proper, but proportionably slow, caste and conservatism ruling everything, class distinctions being most religiously preserved; while in the magic upper circle, consisting principally of mouldy cathedral dignitaries, with their wives and families, to have any ideas which might be considered liberal, either in church matters or politics, was enough to stamp a man as an infidel, or worse. For the latter, in the future, together with Jews, Turks, and heretics, there might be some hope; but a *radical*!—ugh! don't mention the name in such a presence.

Major Featherstone's house, though in the city, was pleasantly situated in a garden of its own; and many happy hours had the four girls spent together here, playing croquet, or, in the hottest days, sitting under the trees, reading and working. Mrs. Featherstone, like many people of strong will, was capable of very warm attachments; and, having loved Mrs. Trevor like a sister, some of that affection

was transferred to Nina and Janet, to whom, with all her oddities and masculine ways, she was invariably kind.

It was here Nina had first met Sir William Chester; and as, since that visit, the girls had scarcely seen each other, they had enough to talk about between Nina's coming marriage and Maud's recent engagement. Maud Featherstone was a plump, round, little thing, of about eighteen, who might improve in time, growing more refined in appearance; but it was possible, also, might develope into *embon-point* as years went on. But, although a great contrast to our heroine, with her slight, graceful figure, and delicately-tinted, tea-rose style of beauty, she was yet charming enough to justify any man's falling in love with her. Gertrude, her twin-sister, was more like their mother in appearance, her bright, dark eyes showing some amount of temper, but evidently linked with an intelligence more than ordinarily acute. Nina had, perhaps, more in common with her than with Maud; but she was fond of them both, for, although she now and then enjoyed a dose of the hard reading in which Gertrude habitually indulged, she

was yet, not like her, above caring for dress, fancy-work, gaieties, and all the small things which fill up so large a part of most girls' lives.

It will be worth while to leave them, to follow Mrs. Nowall into a house which she has just entered, not a hundred yards off. It belongs to Miss Pickup, a maiden lady of a certain, or rather, we should say, *uncertain* age, for no two people are agreed on that point. Even her most intimate friends are here at sea,—and it is not to be wondered at; for, although she is a clever woman, and could, I have no doubt, give you information as to the life and private character of any celebrated historical or mythological personage, together with the real or supposed date of their birth, strange to say, the year of her own introduction to this “work-a-day world” is quite forgotten; even its anniversary is past recognition. She is a great ally of Mrs. Nowall's, and keeps her supplied with tit-bits of Drawlingham scandal. To-day, as the two ladies sit talking over their afternoon tea, eagerly preying on their neighbours' characters, we could almost, as we look at them, become

Pythagoreans, and think that their spirits, such as they are, must once have inhabited some creatures of the vulture tribe—Miss Pickup, in particular, bears so remarkable a resemblance to an attenuated hawk. We are sure our readers require no further description of her personal appearance. She is, at this moment, giving Mrs. Nowall her version of Maud Featherstone's engagement.

"You know, my dear, what a general admirer Mr. Norton has been. He had no more idea of proposing to Maud Featherstone than to me. He kept on visiting at the house, lived there almost, in fact, and thought, by dividing his attentions equally between the two girls, to escape the charge of meaning anything. But he caught a Tartar in Mrs. Featherstone. He is a good match, and she was not likely to let him go, or have her girls talked about, as others had been. So, one day when he called, he found her in the drawing-room alone. Without any beating about the bush, she began,—'Mr. Norton, you have been paying my daughters such very marked attentions, that every one is talking about them. The only difficulty with our

acquaintances is to make up their minds as to which you are in love with. Now *that* is the very point on which I should myself like to be enlightened.'

"Mr. Norton was so taken aback, that he only weakly stammered,—'Really, so unexpected,—wasn't prepared—'

"'Oh, yes! I know all that. I only ask you, *Which of my daughters do you want to marry?* It is no earthly use to answer "Neither." My question is, *Which?*'

"Mr. Norton, reduced to the most abject condition, said,—'Well, I think I like Maud. She has a better temper than Gertrude.'

"'Maud let it be then,' said Mrs. Featherstone. 'To-morrow you will oblige me by speaking to the Major.'

"And so it is settled, my dear," said Miss Pickup.

"Bless me! Well, I never!" rejoined Mrs. Nowall. "I hope Maud will never find out how it has come about, for I believe she has for a long time been desperately in love with the young man; and I don't see, after all, why he should not be a very good husband. Perhaps the whole time he only wanted some

one to help him to make up his mind. But I doubt if he's so rich as people think. I've heard, between ourselves, that he's addicted to gaming. If so, I pity her; but, of course, it may not be true."

"His mother-in-law will keep him in order," said Miss Pickup, "if he tries her too much. I should not be at all surprised if she were to treat him as she does her grooms. Why, she has been known to box their ears; and once I ascertained for a fact that she knocked one of them down because he was impertinent."

"What a woman!" And four hands and eyes were raised in horror at such unfeminine conduct.

"Oh, by-the-bye," said Mrs. Nowall, "I met Mr. Trevor just now, in Colville Street. There's an instance of pride and poverty combined! Although he does hold his head so high, he has scarcely for years been able to keep it above water."

"Ah! and how changed he is, too!" and Miss Pickup looked sentimental, and sighed. "I may tell you, my dear, in confidence, that Mr. Trevor and I were once something more than mere friends. But he, mistaking my

natural modesty and reserve for coldness, sought elsewhere the love he thought me unwilling to bestow." We need not tell our readers that this touching episode had its origin in Miss Pickup's own brain. That lady having, for nearly thirty years past, been labouring under the hallucination that half the gentlemen of her acquaintance were enamoured of her corkscrew ringlets, gaunt figure, and hooked (she called it aquiline) nose. "His was a case," continued Miss Pickup, "of marrying in haste and repenting at leisure. Helen Rowley, besides being as poor as a church-mouse, was always ailing and delicate."

"Hasty marriages seem to be the fashion in their family," interrupted Mrs. Nowall. "Why, it is but the other day Nina met Sir William Chester, and they are to be married in less than three weeks."

"I hope it may be all right," said Miss Pickup; "but there's some mystery about those Rookwood people. Sir William going away suddenly with his mother, as he did some years ago, but no one knew exactly where; and then his return, and the report of her death, when everything was kept so

profoundly quiet that, like Ginevra, no one from that time could find out anything about her except that 'she was not.'"

The conversation here branched off to the affairs of sundry people in the city and neighbourhood, who were one and all stripped of their own characters, and dressed up in the rags of which both the ladies kept a large stock for the benefit of their friends.

"Strong tea and scandal ; bless me ! how refreshing."

CHAPTER VI.

Shall she marry, ay, or not ?

If she marry, what's her lot ?

THE PILOT.

EACH day brought Nina a letter from Sir William, which she as regularly answered, striving to feel pleasure in the task, but failing to satisfy either herself or him. One day, prompted by her kindness of heart and wish to please, she would write more warmly than was compatible with truth. On the next, in her desire not to deceive him, her letter would be

so cold that even his nature, not usually an over-sensitive one, would be pained.

It was a relief to both when he returned to persuade away her fears and scruples. Men, the most reasoning animals in creation, are in love the most irrational; everything that stands in their way must be argued down, or beaten down, or got rid of, somehow or other. Like most of his sex, Sir William fully believed in his own power of inspiring affection, and always ended by making Nina think with him, that only time was wanted to render her feelings as warm as his own. It was when she was alone that doubts would arise, put them away or reason them down as she would; but no girl, especially with Nina's warm, loving nature, could be indifferent to such devotion and affection as was lavished upon her. Sir William did not content himself with words only, but gave substantial proofs of his regard in the presents he bestowed both on Nina and her family. He had just brought her a magnificent set of pearls and emeralds that had belonged to his mother, and which he had taken to town to have re-set. Having ridden over to the Vicarage with them himself, he was fortunate enough to find Nina

in the drawing-room alone. She had been trying a sonata of Clementi's, and thinking "how delightful it would be to play it on the Rookwood piano, and what a pity it was that Sir William did not like music," when he entered the room.

Rising up, she greeted him cordially, saying her father and Janet were lunching at Nympton Park. She had half expected he would call, and so had refused to go, sending Johnny in her place: he was a great favourite there, was allowed to do as he liked, and always enjoyed himself. She did not acknowledge even to herself how much her decision had been influenced by her distaste for Mrs. Nowall's society. As it was, however, Sir William was pleased at what he thought a proof of growing regard for him. He clasped the jewels on her neck and arms, and even against the dark serge of her dress the emerald stars glittered and flashed, till it was almost dazzling to look at them.

Nina was enchanted. "How exquisite the green and white look together!" she said. "I remember, when I was a child, some imaginative person told me once that pearls were

frozen tears; and one cold winter's day, when I was self-willed, and had had a battle with Jane, I suddenly thought I would prove the truth of the assertion, and ran out, with my cheeks still wet, into the frosty air, thinking how nice it would be to get enough pearls to make a necklace for Miss Rosa, my pet doll. My mind being diverted from my trouble, of course the experiment was unsuccessful, as no more tears would come. For a long time I thought that was the only reason for my failure. But how exquisitely they are set, Sir William! What good taste you have! Did you design them yourself?"

"Oh, no, my dear; that sort of thing is not in my line. I enlisted Charley's services. He is usually considered a man of taste, and so, I concluded, must be a judge in such matters."

"I shall be anxious to make your cousin's acquaintance, Sir William, if you are not partial. I should think he must be quite a phoenix."

"Oh, he's a clever fellow enough, but, as I told you before, too *dilettante* in his tastes. However, he is coming on Thursday: he will then have a week or two to make your

acquaintance in. I hope you will take to each other, for he has been more like a son to me than anything else. His parents died when he was so very young."

"What can make them so late?" said Nina.
"It has struck five; I wish they would come."

Sir William did not echo the wish. "Why are you so anxious for the arrival of the others? Are you not happy in being with me, dear?"

"I beg your pardon; I am afraid I seemed very rude. I was only thinking what Janet will say to these lovely things. Did you never hear the rhyme:—

'To have a thing is little, unless you're allowed to show it,
And to know a thing is nothing, unless others know you
know it.'

I think Mrs. Nowall and I might take a line each. Anything she knows would certainly eat holes in her memory if she did not immediately impart it to her friend Miss Pickup, or, in default of her, any one else who can be got to listen; and whatever is given to me, never seems to be really my own till Janet has seen it. But there they are; I am sure

they must be coming. Elsie has no doubt seen them from the nursery window; I hear her scampering downstairs."

CHAPTER VII.

In some breasts passion lies concealed and silent,
Like war's swart powder in a castle vault,
Until occasion, like a linstock, lights it.

OLD PLAY.

CHARLEY CHESTER has been at Rookwood some days, and he and Sir William are to-night having a *tête-à-tête* dinner. Mrs. Chester, for reasons not given, though assuredly good ones, or they would not be hers, has refused to grace the wedding with her presence, and has gone to visit some friends, who are blessed in being congenial spirits. We are not at all sure that Charley is perfectly innocent of having driven her away, for he openly expresses his delight at her absence. It is sad for him that there should be an antagonism between his nature and one of such superhuman excellence as Mrs. Chester's; but such is the case. He makes no

secret of his dislike, and, I am sorry to say, always finds it rather amusing to shock her prejudices and scandalize her, so to speak. She has, consequently, come to the conclusion that he is utterly wanting in what she terms "conscience"; the position of which she has, in her own case, so accurately determined, that she never uses the word without laying her hand impressively on the place where her belt, if she had one, would be fastened, which action takes place very often, for this same conscience is to Mrs. Chester something what Mrs. Harris was to the immortal "Sairey," not so much a reality as a convenient and awe-inspiring name, used to convince people of her superiority to the world in general, and to convert them to her views.

But to return to "Charles," as Mrs. Chester always calls him. It is but fair to give our readers a more faithful likeness of him than they could glean from the preceding chapters. He is eight-and-twenty, tall and well-built, with brown hair and eyes, and a face to puzzle physiognomists. His mouth, which is shaded by a slight moustache, is so flexible and varying in its expression, that you would say it

imported weakness were it not for the determined contour of the chin, which renders such a conclusion impossible. His character, to a superficial observer, is as great a contradiction as his face. He really is the best-hearted fellow in the world; but he is pleased to imagine himself cynical, and does his best to persuade himself and his friends that he has no special interest in anything, that nothing in the world is worth taking trouble about or getting excited over. Even as regards music, which he greatly loves, and thoroughly appreciates, he behaves so oddly, that you begin to doubt sometimes if he really cares even for that. He never talks about it, and, devoted as he is to his violin, and exquisite tones as he brings from it, seeming to make the very strings weep with intense feeling, he yet can rarely be persuaded to play in general society. His usual manner is so off-hand and indifferent that it would make you long to shake him; till now and then an energetic action, or flash of the eyes, would show that there was fire beneath this calm exterior, which it would be dangerous to rouse. The heat of a slumbering volcano is none the less for the snow lying

upon its surface, and Charley Chester is blessed (or the other thing, as it may be) with feelings of more than ordinary sensitiveness and intensity.

Sir William had just been trying, as his habit was, to make him interest himself in farming. "That place of yours, my dear fellow, does not bring you in one-tenth part of what it ought, according to my calculations. Just look at all that piece of common doing nothing; if properly drained and enclosed, it ought to be worth at least two pounds an acre. You should have a talk with Mr. Cozens about it next time you go to Wales; I doubt if he does the place justice."

"I am afraid he will never be required to give an account of his stewardship, if I am to do it," said Charley. "The man is honest enough, I think; and as long as the rents are paid all right, I don't see what else there is to trouble about; and as for taking pleasure in pottering about from field to field, and saying which should be planted in turnips and which in potatoes, and how many acres in grass, and so on, I really could not, if my life depended on it. What is the good of

paying men and then doing the work yourself?"

"A master's eye, Charles, that's what is wanted."

"My dear Sir William, I am utterly dependent on the force of circumstances, and as they don't seem at present to impel me in the direction of Penmarth, I am afraid that lovely spot will not be gladdened by my presence until the autumn, when the partridges, poor beggars, would willingly dispense with it. I never could understand what pleasure Cincinnati could have found in his plough to make him so pertinaciously stick to it. I suppose to him *labor ipse voluptas* was really a truth. Queer fellow!" and Charley leaned back in his chair, smothering a yawn, as if the subject had been too much for him.

Sir William, provoked at what he termed Charley's impracticability, was silent for some moments. At length, the servants being gone, he said,—“Well, now you have been to Nympton, what do you think of them?” He was evidently anxious for the young man's opinion; for he judged, and rightly, that, with all his seeming listlessness, Charley was very

critical, especially on the subject of young ladies, whom he treated in a manner peculiarly his own. Although never failing in real politeness, he seldom paid any compliments, and was not sparing of satire. But this, instead of making him disliked, seemed only to add to his popularity. He was "so eccentric," "so amusing," and, above all, "so handsome," that many girls had already more than half lost their hearts; while he, on the contrary, whenever he gave the matter a thought, could only say to himself, like Benedick,—“I wish I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for truly I love none. One woman is fair, but I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace.”

“What do I think of them? What do I think of her? is nearer your meaning, I expect. Of her mind and conversational powers, you did not give me much opportunity of judging; but with such a face, I should think it impossible she could be wanting in either. She is certainly very lovely. Comparing her with the other girls it has been my lot to meet,

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she is so far superior, that I think the Italian proverb, 'Nature having formed her, must have broken the mould,' would not in this case be an exaggeration. Now, if this is not praise strong enough even to satisfy you, I shall relapse into silence during the rest of my visit, and will not break it even on the wedding-day. Please pass the wine; the very thought of my duties overcomes me."

Sir William laughed, and was quite satisfied. Charley did not think it necessary to tell him what had been the subject of his thoughts the day before, as he watched the lovers. "If I know anything of woman's nature," he said to himself, as he marked Nina's free, unconstrained manner, and the calm way in which she had received all his cousin's attentions, "this is another instance of *l'un qui aime, et l'autre qui se laisse aimer*, which our neighbours on the other side of the Channel say is the usual order of things. That sort of business would not suit me, though. Let it be mutual, or not at all. I could never see any brightness in eyes that would not smile on me. To judge by the depth and earnestness of *those* eyes, and the warm, loving nature

shown by the curve of her lips, she is capable of the strongest emotions, and yet is content to marry, in this calm, unromantic fashion, a man three times her age. What queer beings women are, there's no understanding them. But, after all, it is not my business, nor is there any necessity for me to think of the subject. He is a good-hearted fellow enough, only I wish for her sake he were a little more worthy of her."

CHAPTER VIII.

Grant, good saints,
These clouds betoken naught of evil omen.

OLD PLAY.

It was the eve of the wedding, and at the Vicarage were assembled the few guests who were to be present at the ceremony; that is to say, the Trevors themselves, including Herbert, who had got a week's leave, and had come home radiant with health, and delighted with his ship and all its belongings; the two Misses Featherstone, and of course the Baronet and his cousin. The day was intensely hot, more

like July than May, and now the evening breeze from the sea only made it pleasantly cool. They wandered about the garden in twos and threes, enjoying the air, until it began to get dusk, when lights were brought into the drawing-room, and Nina suggested music; she had begged Charley to bring his violin, and he, wondering at himself, had complied.

Maud Featherstone suggested that they should sit under the verandah. Mr. Trevor hinted something about the night air and prudence. But Nina, adding her entreaties to her friend's, and saying, if she must sing, she would much prefer being in the room alone, his objections were overruled. Perhaps, if the truth were told, he was not sorry to have an excuse for another cigar.

The tones of Nina's true, sweet voice, were most thrilling as they stole through the open window. She had chosen Mendelssohn's "Shepherd's Lay," perhaps partly because the words, — "Leb' wohl, Leb' wohl, Ich wand're von hier," so often repeated, seemed a sort of good-bye to the home which, in spite of its petty cares and anxieties, grew dearer

than ever now that she was about to leave it.

Charley did not join in the chorus of thanks, but neither did he take part in the conversation which was resumed immediately afterwards. He stood leaning against the casement, quietly smoking. Mr. Trevor and Sir William stood a few paces off, discussing routes, hotels, change of money, with all the other items which must be thought of before a Continental tour. The bride and bridegroom were to be away two months, and in that time intended to visit Belgium, Germany, including the Rhine Provinces, and to come home through France, probably stopping a week in Paris.

Nina, after turning over her music for a few minutes, rose; and going to the window, said, —“Mr. Chester, I was about to ask you to try this *andante* of Schubert’s, if your attachment for your cigar is not too great to admit of such a condescension.”

He took his cigar from his mouth, contemplated it in a whimsically affectionate manner for about two minutes, and then said, —“Let us weigh their respective merits; put music in one scale, cigar in the other. Very

evenly balanced. Miss Trevor breathes on the former, down it goes, and off flies the cigar,"—suiting the action to the word. "The question is decided; I place myself at the side of the piano, and am your humble servant for as long as you think proper."

Nina could not answer, as on another occasion she might have done; her usual high spirits seemed for the time to have deserted her. She had never before heard the violin well played; and as its speaking tones fell on her ear in that exquisite movement of Schubert's, they thrilled through her whole frame, till she felt almost faint with emotion. She went on playing as though in a sort of trance, delighting in the sounds, but without individual consciousness that her own fingers had anything to do with producing them.

When they had finished, Charley's usual *insouciance* seemed to have vanished. "Thank you very much," he said, warmly. "I *did* enjoy that, I thought, when I heard you sing, but now I am sure you are one of the few people who love music for its own sake, and not for the effect it will produce on others, or because it is the proper thing to like it."

Nina's lips moved, and she tried to speak, but could not; and when he looked at her more fixedly, he saw her eyes were full of tears.

"My dear Miss Trevor. What—"

"Please do not take any notice," said Nina, her lips still trembling. "I shall be all right directly. I am not only, like Jessica, 'never merry when I hear sweet music,' but I am often absolutely sad. I am afraid you will think me very foolish."

"No, a thousand times no," he answered, seizing her hand, and pressing it warmly. "I understand your feeling thoroughly, and like you the better for it." He could not help it, her eyes looked so pleading and earnest through their tears.

Nina blushed, and rising hastily, left the room as the others entered; and five minutes later, when she returned, looking herself again, none of the party guessed the tumult that had been in her breast as, locked in her own room, she had knelt beside her bed, sobbing as if her heart would break; for the moment her whole soul revolting at the prospect of her marriage. She remained kneeling for a few minutes with her face buried in her hands.

Presently she slowly rose, saying,—“It must go on, it is too late now to change. I have, after all, only to try and do my duty; and, God helping me, I will.”

“Only her duty.” Poor child! she little dreamt what a burden this resolve would lay upon her young shoulders, one almost too heavy to be borne. But this life of ours, although it may be a comedy to those shallow natures whose egotism makes them philosophical, or to those insensible beings whose blood is so cold that it is no trouble to them to “sit like their grandsires, cut in alabaster,” yet rarely fails to be a tragedy to a temperament passionate, and yet sensitive, with a keen susceptibility both to pleasure and pain.

CHAPTER IX.

Fortuna multis dat nimium, nulli satis.

To many Fortune gives too much, to none enough.

ON the evening of a hot July day, some two months after the date of our last chapter, Nina sat in a window in a large hotel in Coblenz;

but the lovely landscape seemed to have lost its accustomed charm; for although her eyes were fixed on the panorama before her, it was very evident her thoughts were far away. The truth is, she was getting home-sick, and wishing for some society beyond that of her husband, a phase of feeling, it is to be hoped, not common among brides, but in this case scarcely to be wondered at.

During the first few weeks, the current of their lives seemed to flow smoothly enough. Sir William was all devotion, while Nina was charmed with everything she saw; the churches, the picture-galleries, and, above all, the music. But he began to get tired and restless at last, while she was irritated at his want of appreciation of all she found most attractive. One night at the opera, for instance (it was Weber's 'Euryanthe'), as Herr Stumme was singing the lovely tenor solo in the second act, she was so moved by the power and yet pathos of the great singer's voice, that she thought "Sir William must be touched by this;" and looking up, hoping to meet an answering glance, she saw he was fast asleep. And so it was. Again and again she tried, but failed to esta-

blish any sympathy between herself and her husband. On no subject, unfortunately, did they seem to have thoughts, ideas, or feelings in common; and it was a relief to her, as well as to him, when they found themselves on their journey homeward.

Sir William had just gone out, as was his custom, after dinner, to smoke a cigar. It was the old story. Having won his bride, he did not take that trouble to gain her love which he had meant and promised her to do. Inconsistency has been preached at, and written against, till there is nothing new to be said about it. And yet here is human nature as great a paradox as ever. We are always longing for what seems unattainable; but if, by any chance, we get the coveted treasure within our grasp, how soon it appears to lose some of its lustre. As long as we have a thing, it seems little worth the pains we took to get it; only on its loss do we again begin to find "the virtue that possession would not show us." Even as children, do we not always think the apples above our heads much finer and sweeter than what are within our reach? We try, by hook or by crook, to get at them.

We climb or strive to knock them down with stone or stick. At last we succeed—faugh! It is only a crab, and all our teeth are set on edge. Children may be pardoned, but will men never give up believing in Dead Sea fruit, though they have seen them times upon times crumbled to dust in their neighbours' hands? In this world of ours, there is not an enjoyment, but pain, at some time or other, pays the income of it. Was it not old Lucretius who said that in the self-same bowl which holds our pleasures, the bitter often rises to the surface? Surely, an Epicurean must know something of the subject.

Mrs. Chester might on this text have preached a sermon on the vanity of earthly things; but don't be alarmed, you shall be spared the infliction. If you want that sort of thing, you may get, according to your proclivities, Jeremy Taylor, or Newman, or Kingsley, or Cumming, and be no doubt much profited by the perusal; but in a novel, which is taken up for relaxation and amusement, a serious element is to my mind a mistake. If teaching is to be conveyed, let it be indirectly. A fiction of an enervating tendency, with a moral popped in at the end

of every chapter, always makes one think of an injudicious parent giving children sweets, indigestible pastry, or unripe fruit, and at the end of the day dosing them with Gregory's powder or magnesia by way of corrective. I, at any rate, will not be chargeable with weakening your moral constitution by such treatment; so, to return at once to our subject. The book on Nina's lap, which she had been reading by snatches, was one bought at the station the day before, '*Inez de Castro.*' It was open at these words:—"Entre deux êtres, dont l'un est aimé par l'autre qui ne l'aime pas, croyez-vous que tout le mal soit pour celui qui aime?" At this point she had laid down the book, mentally ejaculating,—“No, it is far worse for love to be a duty, and to try for it in vain—” when her thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of a waiter bringing a card, but closely followed by a gentleman, who after sending it had evidently changed his mind, and determined to announce himself.

Nina's whole manner changed, and her face brightened as he entered. “Mr. Chester! How ever did you find your way here?”

“By steamer to Ostend, thence by rail;

but, seriously," as they shook hands warmly, "having heard that you had given up the idea of visiting Paris, where I was to have joined you, and Sir William's letter telling me that you were likely to be here about this time, I thought we could not do better than meet on the Rhine. Where is my respected cousin at this moment?"

"Walking on the Quay, I believe," said Nina. "But how long have you been here? Have you dined?"

"Oh! yes, thank you. I arrived last night, slept at the Hôtel du Géant, and have spent the whole day in hunting you up. I inquired here this morning, but, happening to fall in with a waiter more than usually obtuse, was told that no such people as Sir William and Lady Chester were in the place. This afternoon, by the merest chance, I was looking at some photographs in a shop in the adjoining street, when I heard your name mentioned, and there, giving an order to the shopman, was an unmistakable English girl. Fortune, being rather given to bringing in 'boats that are not steered,' usually favours me, and I found I had actually lighted on your own maid,

from whom I, of course, obtained your address, but told her not to mention having met me, as I wished to surprise you."

"I am deeply indebted to Fortune," said Nina; "and, joking apart, I am really very glad to see you; but are you quite sure the non-success of your first visit was due to the dullness of the *Kellner*, and not to the Anglicized German in which he was possibly addressed?"

"Hard upon me, as usual. But will you read Goethe or Uhland with me, by way of improving my accent? I am not above being taught, if you will be my instructor."

"I should like it very much," said Nina, "and I expect the benefit would really be all on my side. But reading in the language of this country is an amusement which must not be indulged in in Sir William's presence. He has such a strong dislike for anything German, that I am sure if he had a seat in Parliament he would try to introduce a Bill for the banishment of German silver, itinerant brass bands, and even of sausages, from the United Kingdom."

"Quand on parle du—" Charley checked himself. "I beg your pardon, but here he is."

It was growing dusk, and the Baronet, as he entered, did not notice that there was any one in the room besides his wife till he heard a voice saying,—“‘There’s many a man has more hair than wit!’ Sir William, I hope this is not your case; but I can see, even in this light, that yours wants cutting.”

“Charley! of all people in the world! Who would have thought of seeing you here? As for my hair, you wouldn’t have me go to one of these foreign rascals, and look for three months like an escaped convict or a lunatic? I am very glad you have come, though; we can go down the Rhine together now. You are quite right, and it is high time to be getting home. I can’t stand their ways; my mouth has already had too much of their trashy cooking, my nose of their filthy sewers, and my ear of their barbarous gutturals. But you’ve not told me what brought you in this direction.”

“The truth is, my dear fellow, I have been going through a course of rigid self-examination since we parted, and finding my deficiencies, as you have often represented to me, very great in pastoral matters, I resolved to turn over a new leaf; and, quite agreeing with

Sir Valentine that 'home-keeping youths have ever homely wits,' thought I could not do better than to give my attention to agrarian pursuits, as practised in the Rhine provinces; hence this (on your part) unlooked-for pleasure."

Nina laughed, amused, as usual, by Charley's odd way of putting things. But Sir William's only rejoinder was to ask for English news. He never could quite understand whether his cousin was in jest or earnest about anything, and followed the somewhat wise plan of ignoring what was beyond his comprehension.

"I really have not seen any one in particular," answered Charley, "except Mrs. Chester, whom I met in May. She was staying with some friends in Grosvenor Square, and was in a high state of spiritual elevation, having been lately going in for a course of religious dissipation, in the shape of Exeter Hall meetings. I fancy this stimulant usually affects her for a long time. If the reaction has not set in before your return to Rookwood I don't envy either of you. So much for things in particular. I believe affairs in general are going on with the machine-like

regularity for which our country is famous. Political information you do not want, for, of course, you get the *Times*. By the way, I went to the Academy the other day. I was disappointed,—found it rather flat; the only pictures, in my opinion, worth looking at so badly hung, that one had to go round the corner to make them out at all. Of course there was the inevitable ‘Portrait of a Lady’ on one side, and the ‘Portrait of a Gentleman’ on the other, staring one out of countenance. I never can help hoping, when I see these wooden productions, that, for the credit of the ‘human face divine,’ no originals could possibly be found. Altogether, the obtrusiveness of the bad works of art quite took away the pleasure one would otherwise have felt in looking at the few good ones.”

“What makes you so severe on the unhappy pictures, Mr. Chester? Were you out of temper on that day? Was it very hot?—or were you at a bachelor’s dinner the night before? If I were not sure that you do not mean half you say, I should be inclined to think that your exceedingly sweeping remarks showed a want of appreciation of art in

general, on the principle of the eye only seeing what it brings with it the power to see."

"Many thanks, Lady Chester," said Charley, bowing. "With your usual kindness, knowing that a certain long-eared animal is notoriously fond of thistles, and imagining me to have some affinity to the creature in question, you always impart to your conversation with me a sort of prickly character."

"Thistles stand a very poor chance before the stroke of a scythe," said Nina; "and you always chop off the head of anything I say in such a summary manner, that I am getting afraid of you. The sensation is new, and I don't quite like it."

Sir William, who had been restlessly pacing the room for some minutes, here rang the bell for lights. And this reminding Charley of the time, he rose, saying he must think of getting back to his hotel, as he had letters to write before bed-time.

"Why don't you let my man fetch your things here?" said his cousin.

"No; I don't think it is worth while, thank you, if, as proposed, we leave to-morrow."

"Well, come and breakfast with us, at any rate," and, Nina seconding the request, they parted on this understanding.

CHAPTER X.

No one is so accursed by fate,
No one so utterly desolate,
But some heart, though unknown,
Responds unto its own.

ENDYMION.

"SIR WILLIAM has lost something by refusing to come with us," said Charley, as, on the next day, after toiling up the winding path, which led through vineyards to the top of Rolandseck, they emerged on a small grassy level, and one of the most lovely bits of all the glorious Rhine scenery burst upon their view.

"He would have come if I had pressed it," said Nina; "but I knew he would be far happier in the carriage with his paper and cigar."

Charley looked at her inquiringly, as though he would have said,—“What on earth can you find in common with him?”

She did not meet his glance, but said simply,—“You know the air is very sultry, and he has been rather subject to headaches lately; so perhaps he was wise not to come.”

Charley rather abruptly changed the subject by calling her attention to the view. “Did you ever see anything so grand,” said he, “as the seven mountains in the distance, the Drachenfels, rugged and ruin-crowned, and that lovely little island of Nonnenwerth, like an emerald set in silver? I am sure that simile ought to be poetical enough to please even you.”

“It is very good of you, Mr. Chester, to suit your conversation to my tastes. It must be such an effort for you to bring yourself down to the level of such a very ordinary mortal as I am. But I will not believe that you don’t like poetry; it must go hand in hand with music. For me, half the pleasure of life would be gone if I were to ignore romance. Your prosaic, matter-of-fact people would, for instance, see nothing in this ruin but a bit of old tumble-down wall, that, for the sake of the ground, ought to be removed; whereas, to any one not so absolutely practical, the place is

invested with an interest quite apart from mere beauty of situation. I almost think I can see poor Sir Roland now, sitting at the window, which must have been just where we are standing, and gazing down on the convent in the island below, straining his sight, and thinking he can distinguish Hildegund's form among her companions, as, in their long veils, they walk in procession to the chapel. I wonder if he did really die of a broken heart!"

"I wonder if he did really build this place at all!" said Charley. "But I will try not to be so sceptical," he hastily added, noting her look of disappointment. "Is that a copy of Schiller?"

"Yes. You will probably accuse me again of being romantic; but I wanted to read 'Ritter Toggenburg' here. It is, as you know, founded on the old legend of Sir Roland. Are you ready to carry out your suggestion of last night and read it to me?"

"I would much rather listen to you, if you don't mind; and it will be quite as improving to the accent you were so hard upon."

Nina, without saying more, sat down on a piece of rock, while Charley threw himself on

the turf at her feet. He had got just exactly what he wanted now, and could watch the droop of her long lashes, and the play of her features, as she read Schiller's touching ballad, thinking of nothing beyond the pathos and beauty of the words she uttered; and not dreaming of the tumult raised in her companion's breast, as, with his eyes fixed on her graceful form, he listened to the soft tones of a voice whose tenderness and feeling seemed to penetrate to the very inmost recesses of that heart which he had always hitherto kept in such perfect control, that he had been inclined to laugh at, as mere folly, any exhibition of weakness on the part of others.

"Of course, I don't expect you to enjoy it as I do," said Nina, as she closed the book.

"You will, I know, laugh at the idea of his dying of a broken heart as high flown and extravagant, and, under the circumstances, it is very good of you to listen so patiently."

"Why *will* you always think of me as ridiculing deep emotions?" said Charley, almost impatiently. "Indeed, I have seen a woman for whose love I could understand a man's going almost any lengths, even—" He bit his

lips, as if to keep back something which he had been on the point of saying.

"She must," said Nina, "be endowed with more than ordinary graces, both of mind and body, to make *you* speak so warmly."

"Yes, *that* she is," he answered, impulsively.

"I should greatly like to make her acquaintance. Is it too much to ask you to introduce me some day?" said Nina, raising her eyes.

What was there in his regard to make her turn away her head so suddenly? For minutes neither spoke, and the birds, which a short time before had been filling the air with their songs, seemed to be silent in sympathy; for not a sound was to be heard beyond the rustling of the wind among the branches. Soon this was accounted for—it was the hush which Nature usually subsides into before a violent storm,—as if she were husbanding her strength, and reserving all her energy for one grand outburst.

Both Nina and Charley had been too much absorbed to notice the gradual darkening of the sky till a flash of lightning, immediately followed by a tremendous thunderclap, woke them to a sense of their situation. Far away

from any dwelling, the only approach to a shelter being a sort of small hut or summer-house in a vineyard just below; into this Charley hurried Nina as the rain began to come down in large drops, and it was hopeless to think of returning till the storm had somewhat abated.

It was a queer little place in which they found themselves, and one seldom used except in the grape season; the only furniture being a small, rough table, and two or three stools to match, while it was protected on three sides only from the weather. On the present occasion this was quite enough; for the rain, which began to pour in torrents, came down so straight that little more than a roof was needed to keep them dry.

"It was very thoughtless of me," said Charley, "to have exposed you to this; but it is useless to try to get back. I doubt if even I could find my way down the hill-side in such a storm, and for you it is out of the question."

"What shall we do?" and Nina looked at her watch. "It is nearly five o'clock, and we were to have got on to Bonn in time for dinner to-night."

"I dare say they will find us something to eat at the little inn below; but, for a short time, there is nothing to be done but to remain here, and decline the word 'patience.' If we were to attempt to face this storm, we should soon be in the condition of an unfortunate man I heard of, who, in the West Indies, insisted upon braving the rain, which comes down there in earnest. He was flattened as flat as a half-penny, and passers by heard a miserable voice saying,—'Dear friends, take warning by me, and never go out without an umbrella.' By-the-way, did you ever hear what the ancient Britons used to do to avert or check a storm?"

"No, I never heard; but, if it is anything likely to be effectual in the present instance, please try it."

Charley smiled. "I am afraid, for many reasons, it would not answer. First, they had to procure magic arrows, which were only to be found on a particular rock on the coast of Normandy; then these were to be shot into the air by youths who had never known what it was to love: if they were successful in calming the elements, it was a supposed proof of their

truth, and they were rewarded by the hand of one of the Druid priestesses."

"What a happy state of affairs! I hope it was found satisfactory to all the parties concerned."

"As satisfactory as ninety-nine out of a hundred matrimonial arrangements ever were, are, or will be," said Charley. "I should like you to meet my friend Merton: his ideas on the subject of the affections are most peculiar. He is odd, in fact, altogether. If you can conceive a metaphysician, a philosopher, and a poet rolled into one, you have Fred Merton before you. Perhaps the chief reason for my regard is because he is so unlike the rest of the world. The people one usually meets are like so many box or yew trees, trained, pruned, and clipped by education and society into peacocks, monkeys, mummy-like pillars, or flat nonentities, till there is not a scrap of originality left about them. You never meet Merton, on the contrary, without getting a fresh idea of some sort,—possibly wild, and seemingly absurd, but still uncommon. About what we were talking of just now,—he maintains that no being is sent into the world without having

somewhere or other his or her double,—one between whose nature and their own are inexplicable affinities of sympathy. It is quite possible, he says, that they might never meet, that the streams of their lives might not be united till they mingle in the great ocean of eternity; but should they come across each other, they cannot fail to be mutually and irresistibly attracted; and only when these two wed, he declares, is it a perfect marriage. Mind, I do not give these as my opinions, I merely repeat them at second-hand."

"I quite believe you," said Nina. "You keep every one in the dark as to *your* private views of things in general."

"I am not sorry that you think so. I quite agree with Wallenstein, that one should keep much that one knows, and more that one thinks, to oneself. Do you remember how Schiller makes him say, 'What is mine remains so as long as it is in my own breast, but once allowed to escape from that safe corner, it becomes the property of others'? There is nothing like secretiveness for keeping one out of other people's power; and as many persons are ready to believe in what they

cannot comprehend, so reticence is generally a source of influence."

"I don't know that I quite agree with you," said Nina; "it seems to me a somewhat selfish way of reasoning. Suppose Solomon, or any of the other wise men that the world has seen, had gone on this principle, and kept their ideas under lock and key, what a loss the world would have sustained."

"Ah! but you may depend upon it they knew how to seal their lips when occasion required. Talking of Solomon, though, reminds me of an amusing story I came upon the other day in an old Latin book. If you like, I will tell it you on our way; for look, it is quite fine again, and I know you must want to start."

"Yes, I think we must," said Nina, fastening up her dress to keep it out of the wet. "Please go on; although we must walk in single file, I can hear you quite well."

"It is said," continued Charley, "that when the Queen of Sheba visited him, he was much struck by her beauty; but, being a connoisseur, we may suppose, on the subject of neat feet, he was much disappointed that she wore her

dresses so long that he never could catch a glimpse of her foot and ankle. Wise in small matters as in great, he had a clear stream made to run across part of his garden, and this was covered with glass. As he was walking with his guest, he led her that way, apologizing for her having to cross the water, but saying that was the only means of getting to the other side. Not knowing the glass was there, she raised her dress to prevent its being wetted, and then the King exclaimed,—‘Now I am satisfied, her feet are equal to her face in beauty.’”

“Very impertinent of him, I think,” said Nina.

“The history does not go on to relate if such was her opinion, but probably it was,” said Charley. “Who in the world is that, though? Surely it must be Sir William. But, in the name of everything that’s odd, what is he doing?”

And well he might be astonished, for there, coming to meet them, was the Baronet, looking very red and angry, and literally driving before him two unhappy men, whose gesticulations and look of abject terror were ludicrous

in the extreme. He had been seized with the notion that some accident must have happened to either Nina or Charley. Making up his mind to go in search of them, and seeing these men working on the hill-side, not being quite sure of his road, he had asked them (of course in English) to show him the way. They, naturally enough, did not understand him, and merely looked at each other, laughing, and shrugging their shoulders. At this Sir William became very irate; he was sure they comprehended what he said quite well; he pointed up the hill, shook his walking-stick at them, and threatened to punish their insolence if they did not immediately comply with his request. The poor men thought he must be mad, and started to run up the hill, looking around them in hope of succour, and closely followed by the irate *Engländer*. At this moment, to the relief of all parties, Charley and Nina were seen coming.

The frightened peasants were soon pacified by an application of that salve which Englishmen use on all occasions and for every sort of wound, from the crushed heart of Miss Angelina Pining, who brings an action for damages

against her lost Edwin, to the sore conscience of the *free* and independent elector, who has happened, against his principles, to vote on the Conservative side. Sir William's feelings were, however, not so soon calmed. Between anger, anxiety, and his unwonted exertions, he was, poor man, almost ill, and it was not until the next day that he recovered his equanimity.

CHAPTER XI.

Something of a wayward, modern mind,
Dissecting passion.

TENNYSON.

I must, in spite of them, maintain
That man and all his works are vain ;
And that this boasted lord of nature
Is both a weak and erring creature.

THE LOGICIANS REFUTED.

“ I TELL you plainly, Mr. Norton, if it had not been for the sake of Maud, who cares for you far more than you deserve, I should not have shown you so much forbearance. I don't care in the least for Mrs. Grundy, but you do ; and what think you will society say to a man who, becoming engaged to one girl, is not satisfied

with her devotion, but expects her sister also to fall down at his feet and worship him? Thank Heaven! we don't live in patriarchal times, or I might not have had a voice in the matter."

"Oh, Gertrude, do not be so hard upon a fellow! Have I not told you it was you and not Maud I cared for all along? I was very angry at your manner, and thought to pique you; but I have only succeeded in punishing myself."

"Perhaps another time, Mr. Norton, you will not be so unfair to a woman's nature as to judge it by your own."

"There it is again; you never will vouchsafe me a civil word,"—and Reginald Norton, to whose lot it had not often fallen to receive a repulse, pushed back his chair impatiently, and stalked to the window, where he stood, leaning his elbows on the sash, and drawing his fingers through his yellow hair, ruffling it up, till he bore the appearance of an enraged cockatoo. And savage he certainly was; with the world, with himself, with Maud, with every one but Gertrude, who was the cause of his mortification. But the more she snubbed

him, as she did unmercifully, strange to say, the more he cared for her. Her cleverness, her sarcasm, the flash of her dark eyes when she was angry, all served to enchain his erratic nature more than any number of smiles and blushes could have done.

Since his engagement, she had always avoided seeing him alone; but this afternoon, as there was to be a dinner-party, to which he was invited, no one had expected him to call, and Maud had gone to ride with her father, while Mrs. Featherstone was also out of the way, and so there was no escape for Gertrude without being absolutely rude.

As he stood at the window, inwardly chafing, Gertrude quietly continued covering a book intended for a small *protégée* of hers, whose uncertain footsteps she was trying to lead along the road, which the child found anything but a royal one, whatever may have been her experience.

Presently Mr. Norton turned and came up to her again. "Oh, Gertrude, do have pity on me!"

"I am sorry, but I have none to spare just now. I need it all for myself on the present occasion."

"You won't believe in my love for you," said he, trying to take her hand, which she almost snatched away. "It will break my heart if you will not listen to me."

"And break my sister's if I do," said Gertrude. "I wonder which is more worthy of being spared—hers in all its freshness and truth, or that fragment which you possess, and are pleased to denominate a heart; but which, I must acknowledge, I find difficulty in recognizing as such after the thousand-and-one bits that have been chipped off it and bestowed in all directions. And to think that you still dare to address such words to *me!*"—and Gertrude clenched her small fist,—"*to me!* when you have been engaged to my sister for three months, professing to love her, and she almost worshipping you! Ugh! When I see what marriage usually is, I think I would be thrown from the top of the cathedral tower before I would put faith in any man living. They seem to me to be, from their cradle to their grave, nothing but an embodiment of egotism and selfishness. The young son and heir, scarcely out of the nurse's arms, tyrannizes over his little sisters, and makes them yield

everything up to him, using, as conclusive, the argument, 'I a boy.' And so on through every stage of life, ending with the irascible elderly gentleman, a martyr to gout, which has probably been induced by want of moderation, but which is sure to be visited on his unoffending wife and daughters, who, however they may delude themselves, are nothing but the veriest white slaves in existence. Development of species, indeed!" looking at Darwin's book, which lay on the table. "I should call it rather degeneration of morals. Many a monkey has more conscience than some of the 'lords of creation' it has been my misfortune to meet,"—and Gertrude's lip curled, as she glanced at the specimen before her.

She was frightened at the effect her words had produced, for he actually had tears in his eyes. He was not a bad man, only a very weak one; and as, for the time, he would have given anything to win Gertrude's regard, her bitter words, which he took to himself, stung him to the quick.

"Tell me what I shall do," he said.

Gertrude began to relent at his evident contrition. "Give my sister the love she

deserves," she answered; "it cannot be very hard. If you will excuse me for saying so, I don't think you quite know your own mind. It is only because you happen to meet with resistance on my part, that you imagine you care for me more. And now, if you will think over what I have said, I am sure your good sense will assert itself; and you will come here this evening, having, like a reasonable man, got rid of the fancies which have been so troublesome to both of us."

"I will try, as you wish it," he said. "But will you, in return, think better of me? Is it a bargain?" holding out his hand.

She took it as if it had been meant for good-bye, saying,—“I make no promises, because I believe in deeds more than words; but do *your* part, and I don't think you will find me wanting. *Au revoir.*”

“What weak-minded beings young men are!” said Gertrude to herself, as the door closed. “I suppose the scheme of Nature would not be complete without them, and so they must be put up with as necessary, but they certainly are unmitigated evils; and as for that aberration of reason commonly called ‘falling in love,’ I

should think Puck did nothing else but go about dropping juice on people's eyes by the way of contraries in which it works. Oh, dear! this world would be a much more sensible one than it is, and there would be fewer victims to the so-called 'tender passion,' if people would only think a little more and feel somewhat less. It is quite possible to conquer any weakness of the kind, I am certain, by giving the brain something rational to think of, and training the mind to common sense. If there were not so much sentimental rubbish written and talked about, life would be much more desirable. If I had children, shouldn't they grow up with sound notions on such subjects. *I have children!* No, I am not of Napoleon's opinion, and don't, thanks be, think it a duty I owe to society. The wretch! if he had spoken to me as he did to Madame de Staël, he would not have ventured on it a second time. Oh! Maud, have you had a pleasant ride? Where did you go?"

"On the Hilton road; and, as we were so near Rookwood, I persuaded papa to let me call at the lodge to find out when Nina and Sir William were expected, and we hear they are in town now, and intend to be at home in a few weeks."

"Actually! Dear old girl, I *shall* be glad to see her. I wonder if she is altered by the weight of matrimonial cares."

"I shan't let you speak in that way, Gertrude. What have you been doing in my absence to bring one of your anti-matrimonial fits on?"

"Coming out in a new light, my dear—moralizing. But go and take off your habit, you lazy child. It is almost time to dress for dinner; and, of course, knowing who is coming, you will make yourself very fascinating. There is no need, by-the-way, to give you that advice; mortals in your deluded condition are always supposed to be that to each other, are they not?"

CHAPTER XII.

Pas une puissance qui n'ait son entourage, pas une fortune qui n'ait sa cour.—VICTOR HUGO.

THE season was drawing to a close when Sir William brought his young wife home; that is,

to his house in town. He was anxious to introduce her to such of his friends as had not already flown to their country-seats or to some watering-place at home or abroad; and he was himself glad to be once more in what he called "civilized"—meaning English society.

She was greatly admired, perhaps not so much for her peerless beauty (for handsome women were not scarce) as for the freshness of her manners and conversation. She was always well bred, and yet so utterly unconventional, that men of the world were quite startled by her straightforwardness and *naïve* remarks about persons and things; but they were charmed notwithstanding, and hearts went down before her by the dozen. If she had been naturally either vain or self-conscious, her head might have been turned by the homage she received; but as it was, flattery passed harmlessly over her head. She seemed somehow by instinct to take it for what it was worth; and in spite of her lively appreciation of anything amusing, her readiness to be talked to, and her quick repartee, there was such an innate simplicity and dignity about her, that no one could for a moment forget the respect

due to her as Sir William's wife. Charley's brother officers raved about her, but only to a favoured few would he grant an introduction; and he never suffered her to be discussed in his presence any more than if she had been his own wife or cherished sister.

Among the gaieties of the metropolis, no parties were so popular as Lady Peyton's; whether balls, *soirées musicales*, or conversaziones, she always contrived to make them pleasant. Caring more for quality than quantity, her rooms were never over-crowded, and she gathered together congenial spirits. Men of genius, poets, artists, and musicians, whom nothing would induce to go much into society, were to be found in her drawing-rooms; even ardent politicians, who in general cared little for frivolities, at Lady Peyton's request were content to consign blue-books to temporary oblivion. One secret of her popularity was that no guest of hers, however insignificant, was ever allowed to feel himself neglected. She had that rare tact, which few women, still fewer men, possess, that is, the power of thoroughly adapting her conversation to the person she addressed,—seeming interested in all

they said, and rendering them contented both with her and themselves, and, as a consequence, with the world in general. There is no key which so surely unlocks the human heart as this subtle flattery; the depth of a man's vanity is beyond conception. Make a person think well of himself, and he is almost sure to like you, as one who knows more than the rest of the world how to appreciate his manifold perfections.

But Lady Peyton was not a mere woman of the world. She might rule, but never allowed herself to be ruled by society; was a devoted wife and mother, and possessed a warmth of heart and consideration for the feelings of others not always found in leaders of fashion.

Such being her character, it was fortunate for Nina that a sort of cousinship between Sir William and Lord Peyton led to her being thrown much into their society. Lady Peyton took her at once under her wing, as it were, and felt an almost motherly interest in the young bride. She watched her attentively, and noticed that, in spite of her usual animation and cheerfulness, her face in repose bore an expression of sadness unusual at her age.

Lady Peyton could not help speculating as to its cause, and fancying that for some reason Nina was not happy in her marriage. But she kept her own counsel, and only redoubled her kindness, not seeking to penetrate what she thought quite a proper reserve on the part of the young wife. Yet there was nothing in Nina's manner towards her husband to induce the world to think that their marriage had been any other than one of affection. She always seemed to study his tastes, and attended to his slightest wishes; and yet few men would not willingly have put up with a little more wilfulness, and taken it as a stronger proof of love than such constant observance and respect.

Lord Peyton's house in Mayfair was brilliantly lit. It was their last ball for the season, and no pains had been spared to make it surpass its predecessors. Sir William and Lady Chester were, of course, honoured guests. The latter, though her acquaintance with the London world was not a month old, had already become the rage; every one talked of her, and pointed her out. She was dressed to-night in white satin, its soft folds enhancing

the beauty of her slender but perfectly rounded form, while waves of tulle floated about her, caught up here and there with sprays of delicate maiden-hair fern, which looked so natural that you almost wondered they did not wither. On her fair neck and round white arms were the same emeralds and pearls which had so delighted her when they first made their appearance at Nympton Vicarage.

Sir William felt justly proud of the admiration his wife excited. He understood better than she did the buzz which followed them as he led her up to their hostess.

"I am glad you are come," said the latter, glancing admiringly and affectionately at Nina; "I have been looking out for you. I am afraid to say how many partners are anxiously awaiting your arrival, so I must not detain you longer now; but by-and-by I want to introduce to you a gentleman for whom I have a great respect. He is, moreover, a friend of Charley's. Dr. Merton; you may have heard his name."

"Oh yes," said Nina, "I have heard Mr. Chester speak of him often."

"If you have gained your opinion of him

from Charley, you are sure to have formed a high one, for they are fast friends—another instance of extremes meeting; and yet Charley thinks the world does not contain Dr. Merton's equal in depth of thought and originality; while, on the other hand, Charley's versatility, his musical powers, and *savoir faire*, call forth quite as much admiration on the part of his friend."

Later on in the evening, in an interval between the dances, Nina was seated near her husband, who was discussing politics with some elderly gentlemen, old-fashioned Conservatives like himself, and lamenting the levelling tendency of the age, the freedom of thought allowed by the present system of education, the laxity of morals exhibited in modern amusements, the revolutionary spirit shown in much of the current literature. What a prolific subject for those to whom prejudice was an absolute law-giver! And although they could not deny that the new ideas were those of progress, they were, nevertheless, fully convinced that the growth was a downward one, leading straight to democracy, with all its attendant evils.

Nina's mind was only half attending to the platitudes political of the older and the platitudes complimentary of the younger men grouped around her, when she caught sight of Charley coming towards them, and with him a gentleman, who could be no other than the Dr. Merton of whom she had heard so much. His appearance was striking. He was tall and broad-shouldered, with the slightest possible stoop; his hair, which was dark, was parted in the middle, and allowed to grow rather long behind; a beard, of the same colour, reaching half way to the waist; and eyes so penetrating you dared not look at them long enough to define their shade. All this Nina's quick glance noted as he was presented to her. He merely bowed, without uttering any of those common-places usual on such occasions. Nina began to feel rather uncomfortable as his earnest, though not rude, gaze seemed to look her through and through. But this state of things did not suit Charley. He broke the spell by saying,—“Lady Chester, will you be good enough to grant me a few inches' space at your side? I am desperately fatigued. I am afraid I shall never in this life attain

to the *dolce far niente*, much as I long for it."

"I trust Lady Chester, with me, Charley, knows you too well to believe your own account of yourself. You strive hard to make the world think you one of those easy sleepers whose mere existence is a shallow dream; whereas I know no man who can be more in earnest, or who is willing to take greater trouble for the sake of a friend."

"Well said, most grave signor. I am glad you appreciate my devotion in having dragged you out of your dreary solitude to introduce you to a scene like this. If you had not been duly grateful after my superhuman exertions, I certainly would have refused to play any longer the part of Damon to your Pythias; and I tremble to think what would happen to you without my guardianship. Now confess you are not sorry you came."

"Sorry, I am not; for there is always something to study in one's fellow-men, and this section of infinite space, in which so many souls are gathered together, such enigmas to themselves and to each other, with all their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, must

set one thinking ; but when my mind comes back to itself, as in its egotism it is sure to do, I feel rather out of place here, as a horse would in a flower-garden."

"Do not be so unjust to yourself, Dr. Merton," answered Nina. "I can speak for more than one to whom your coming has given pleasure."

He smiled as he gazed at the honest eyes raised to his—a smile which lit up his whole countenance, as though a ray of sunlight had passed over it. Even *he* recognized the charm of Nina's free, unconstrained manner ; and as she was claimed for the valse which the band at that moment struck up, he for some moments watched her graceful, undulating movements ; then, turning to Charley, he said,—“Such a living, breathing poem is more lovely to look upon than any painting or sculpture within the range of art. It must have been just such eyes of heavenly blue that Heine wrote about. You remember his short piece of two verses ?”

Charley answered absently. He was haunted by the words of another song by the same poet, ‘The Sea hath its Pearls,’ the exquisite

idea of which has been so well rendered by Longfellow, that it is almost as familiar to English as German ears. He could not help thinking, as the emerald stars she wore flashed at every movement, how suitable the words "brighter than pearls or stars" were, as applied to her.

Sir William wished to leave early, as the morrow was their last day in town, and he had many engagements. In going, he stopped at the top of the broad steps to press Dr. Merton, whom he had known from a boy, to visit them some time at Rookwood. Charley, after settling Nina comfortably in the carriage, as they shook hands, retained hers, saying anxiously, "I must see you to-morrow to say good-bye. Tell me if I may come before luncheon."

She did not speak; but it is possible her fingers tightened on his, for he appeared satisfied.

CHAPTER XIII.

From little things—a star—a flower,
That touched us with the self-same thought;
My passion deepened hour by hour,
Until to that fierce heat 'twas wrought,
Which, shrivelling over every nerve,
Crumbled the outworks of reserve.

OWEN MEREDITH.

NINA's boudoir, or morning-room, faced the south, and looked very bright and inviting, with its window-gardens filled with flowers, the perfume of which pervaded the room, while, scattered here and there, were statuettes, mirrors, old china, and pictures in Venetian frames. The easy lounging-chairs which Nina had introduced, and the books, periodicals, and tasteful work-baskets on the table, gave the place a home-like feel, which, in former days, it had not known. It was one of Nina's peculiarities that she never lived long in a room without its seeming to grow more habitable and comfortable under her influence.

On the morning after the ball she had settled herself in one of the low chairs, and

was trying to work; but, as if her thoughts worried her, she would every now and then put down her embroidery, and take up an illustrated paper. Even this did not prevent her dropping off again into a reverie, which, for a minute, you might judge to be pleasing by the smile which hovered round her lips. But soon a shade would pass over her face, and the bright look would be replaced by one of infinite sadness and pain, and she would rouse herself with a sort of shake, as though she had been dreaming that life was beauty, but woke herself forcibly to the remembrance that it must be nought but duty. At last, too restless to remain seated, she rose, and, going to the window, began to pull one of her cherished blossoms in pieces; then, turning to the piano, ran one hand listlessly over the keys. Suddenly she became red and pale by turns, and she put one hand on her heart, as though to still its beatings, as a light step was heard on the stairs. She recovered her composure sufficiently, however, to answer calmly, when Charley, on entering the room, said, "Good-morning. I hope you are not tired after last night."

"Not a bit, thank you; but I did not feel inclined for an expedition to the City, whither Sir William is gone to look at a new reaping-machine."

"Certainly that could not have much attraction for a lady. But how charming this room looks in the early morning. Those tea-roses, and the heliotrope and mignonette are delicious!"

"Some people find the scent of flowers overpowering," said Nina; "but I can never have too much of it. On the contrary, I don't feel the slightest affection for scentless flowers. They always remind me of handsome people, who have nothing else to recommend them,—no good qualities of heart or mind."

"I never heard the idea before, but I quite agree with you; and yet how few people would not prefer the showy geranium, or the exquisitely formed camellia, to the sweet wood-violet!"

"How lovely the trees in the country must be looking now," said Nina.

"Ah!" answered Charley, with a half-sigh, "you are anxious to get away to the birds and green fields. Of course it is natural you

should long for the country ; you leave nothing behind you much worth caring for."

"Indeed, you do me an injustice, Mr. Chester. I am very sorry to part from my friends in town ; but I have never been away from home so long before, and I *shall* be glad to see them all again, especially my father."

Her companion appeared irritated by her remarks, natural as they seemed. "You are fast attaining," said he, "that well-bred superiority to strong emotions which is so marked a characteristic of fashionable society. I only came to say good-bye, and that is soon done ; so I must not detain you any longer. I wish you a pleasant journey," holding out his hand.

Nina rose, and strove to speak ; but her strongly repressed feelings had been too much for her. The room seemed to swim round, she turned ashy-white, even to the very lips, and would have fallen had he not caught her. "Darling, forgive me. I did not know you cared so," as he pressed warm, loving kisses on cheek and lips, and brow.

Presently, with a sort of fluttering sigh, she opened her eyes, and, seeing his face bending over her, she closed them again, like one trying

to continue a happy dream, and dreading to wake to the realities of life; but soon as consciousness more fully returned, she raised her head from his shoulder, and gently disengaged his arms, saying with a deep blush,—“Oh! I forgot. What will you think of me!”

“Think of you! my dearest Nina. How could I have seen you, and known you so intimately all this time, without knowing you to be all that is purest and best on earth?”

He would have taken her hands in his, but she clasped them together, saying,—“Oh, Charley, have pity on me. I am so weak.”

“I will,” he said, soothingly, going off to the table, and seeming to be greatly interested in the pattern of an ivory paper-knife. “Don’t distress yourself. I cannot bear to see you so.”

She sank, still trembling, into a chair, leaned her elbow on the table, and rested her head on her hand, while he returned to his old station by the mantel-piece, and stood there looking down at her.

“Believe me, dear Nina, I have tried hard for your sake, for your peace of mind, to keep back any expression of the love which has been tearing my very heart in two in its struggles

with the duty I felt I owed you and my cousin. Heaven knows I have fought against the feeling; but from the first moment I saw you it has been too much for me—even then, your touch thrilled through me—a mere look from you had more power to move me than anything else in the world; but what was that compared with the strength and intensity of the feelings which have grown since? And yet, I never meant to speak. I did not once dare to hope or dream that you felt as now I know you do. My darling! my darling! it makes it all the harder. How can I bear to give you up?" His voice shook, but, by an effort, he recovered himself, and, as she still continued silent, he went on,—“Nina, say one word! Tell me you are not angry!"

“How could I be angry with you? But one thing—we must not meet again. Will you promise me to keep away?" Her voice choked as she said it.

“I can't, I can't. I should die if I thought I might from this time never look upon—never speak to you again."

“Don't say that. You who have so much to live for, and to make life happy. It will be

hard at first to—to both of us; and yet, Charley, I should be little worthy of the esteem of such a nature as yours if I could, in selfish regard for my own feelings, forget” (a spasm of pain passed over her face) “those of my husband.”

More she said—deep, heartfelt, solemn words, too sacred for these pages. When she ceased, he flung himself on his knees before her, took both her hands in his, and gazed into her steadfast eyes with a look of such reverence, she might have been a saint at whose shrine he was worshipping. “You have conquered me,” he said, at last, bowing his head upon her hands. “If we never meet again, however long I live, wherever I may be, you will always be associated in my mind with all that is holiest and best. Good-bye. It is the last. I must go, or my resolution will fail. Good-bye.”

For some minutes he remained with his face still hidden, then, without daring to look at her again, he slowly left the room. There were tears upon Nina’s hands—not her own: she passionately kissed them away, then her courage broke down. Flinging herself upon the couch, she buried her head in the cushions, stifling the moans she could not repress. At

last all sound ceased, except an occasional sobbing sigh, for sleep, that "balm of hurt minds," had come to ease her aching head and soothe her tortured heart; and be assured if ever good angels watched o'er mortals' dreams, they were sent to comfort her; for she had in her weakness fought a battle, the hardest that can come to any of us, and was, though crushed and suffering, yet victorious.

CHAPTER XIV.

"If all be dark, vague voice," I said,
"These things are wrapt in doubt and dread,
Nor canst thou show the dead are dead."

'The Two Voices.' TENNYSON.

ON the Sunday morning after their return to Rookwood, Nina, with her husband and Mrs. Chester, was walking through the park on her way to the small private chapel, in which one service was held every week. From time immemorial it had been a custom with the Chesters to attend their parish church at Hilton in the afternoon; but there had been a new rector

lately appointed, and one of whom Mrs. Chester strongly disapproved.

She was just enlightening her companions as to some of his misdeeds. He had introduced innovations in the services; had even objected to the school-girls sitting in the choir and singing,—as if, forsooth, there were any special sanctity in boys. *That* point gained, she knew he would next be for dressing them up in cassocks and surplices, and no one knew where it would all end—probably in Rome. She had thought when she saw him first he had looked “dangerous,” whatever that might mean. His coats were so high, and the amount of white about his neck alarmingly small,—she pitied the unfortunate parish. After a few more remarks, she suddenly remembered that Mr. Meek was an old pupil of Mr. Trevor’s, and that Nina, knowing her father had done all he could to get him appointed, might possibly not like to hear him criticized; but *that* consideration was nothing when compared with the obligation which lay at her door to give her voice on all occasions for the right, and she did not repent of having spoken. If people’s feelings were hurt, she was sorry,

but could not help it: her first duty was to her conscience, and that must have nothing to reproach her with.

Nina noticed the set of Mrs. Chester's lips and the hand action, and knew that her moral obligations must be the subject of her thoughts; so she left her to her edifying self-contemplation, and, turning to Sir William, began to talk about her old home, where she had spent the greater part of the previous day.

"I wanted them to come to us to-morrow," she said, "and offered, as you told me I might, to send the carriage for them; but papa and Janet are engaged for an archery and croquet party at Nympton Park—an infliction my father endures once or twice in the season, although he has not much taste for that sort of thing. On Tuesday they have a school-treat. They want me to go, but I don't think I shall; somehow I don't feel up to amusing the children. I would rather be there when I can have papa all to myself and be quiet.

"Why, what *has* come over you, child?" said Sir William. "You used to be up to anything in the way of fun, and since we left town you have been so languid and unlike yourself."

"Am I?" Nina answered, with a half-sigh. "Papa said he was glad I was back again, for he thought London hours did not suit me; and to tell the truth I do feel rather tired."

Mrs. Chester, little dreaming how much the events of the last few days would have justified Nina in being far worse both in health and spirits than she was, thought it a good opportunity for pointing a moral.

"You will learn in time, my dear Nina," she said, with precise manner and measured voice, "that life was made for something better than mere frivolities. The reaction from which you are suffering now, after such a short experience of the world's deceitful pleasures, is mercifully sent to convince you that you were meant for something better."

Sir William was too much accustomed to his sister-in-law's improving conversation to take much notice; but Nina was not so unmoved. She did not speak certainly, but her heightened colour and quickened pace showed that the dogmatic remarks of her new relative had produced their usual effect, in making her feel not only uncomfortable, but naughty.

After service, many of the people, prin-

cipally their own tenant-farmers and cottagers, waited about the gate, anxious to be introduced to the new mistress. Nina's frank manner, so free alike from condescension or familiarity, quite won their hearts. It does not take the poor long to find out what stuff people are made of. In powers of discrimination and as judges of character, they often excel their so-called superiors; and as they dispersed, walking away in knots of two or three, they talked of little else but Lady Chester's beauty, her youth, and "pretty manners."

Mrs. Chester had gone directly they left the chapel; and as Sir William was with Mr. Hunt, the chaplain, debating some subject which did not interest her, Nina wandered about the little cemetery, looking at the inscriptions on the stones, and admiring the roses and other flowers which grew profusely in all directions. Only members and retainers of the family rested here, and it was so well planted and beautifully kept as to bear little resemblance to the ordinary type of English burial-grounds.

"I hope you will excuse me for detaining

Sir William so long," said Mr. Hunt, as Nina joined them, and they walked on together. "I was just telling him an amusing incident which occurred in my yesterday's experience. I went to see an old Mrs. Smith who lives in the village, and whose acquaintance you must make, she is such a character. I found her son was very ill with scarlet fever, of which, I am sorry to say, there have been several cases in the neighbourhood. On inquiry I found she had not sent for a doctor, but had been giving her boy some medicine which Mr. Gurney ordered her last year, when she 'had the rheumatics so bad,' and it had done her such a 'power o' good,' she was sure if that didn't make John better, nothing else would."

"It is strange," said Nina, "how little people in that class of life reason. It seems scarcely credible any one should think that the treatment prescribed for rheumatism should answer in a case of fever."

"After all," said Mr. Hunt, "absurdity in the way of self-doctoring is not confined to the poor. I do not think there exist many families not boasting one member who advocates the claims of some pet patent medicine, which he

is not content with trying on his own person, but almost forces on his unfortunate friends and relatives, for every complaint alike, whether it be chilblains or phthisis, small-pox or toothache they are suffering from. Just calculate the amount of money spent in one year on quack medicines. Look at the advertisement-sheets in the newspapers, half-full of wonderful statements proving the unfailing efficacy of certain drugs, pills, or ointments. There must be a great many knaves in the world to puff these things, but a still greater number of fools to swallow both lies and nostrums. But I must turn back; I promised to lunch with Meek at the Rectory, and to help him this afternoon. He has up-hill work at Hilton with some of his parishioners, a set of narrow-minded idiots, who have not sense enough to discover the genuine stuff he is made of, but must needs look with suspicion on all he does because he has chosen to make some alterations in the services."

"It was well," said Sir William, when Mr. Hunt was out of hearing, "it was well Mrs. Chester was not here to listen to that commentary on her remarks about Mr. Meek. It

would have been rather a strong dose for her, and Mr. Hunt would have been in greater disfavour than ever. His views on subjects in general are much too broad for her taste. But you have not told me how you like the chapel, dear," taking her hand, and drawing it through his arm. "You have never properly seen it until to-day."

"I like it very much, and the situation is charming." Her voice softened, and she drew nearer to her husband's side as she said,— "While you were talking to Mr. Hunt, I was looking for your parents' graves. I thought I should like to attend to them myself, but I could not find Lady Chester's. Did she not die here?"

Sir William started, and looked at her almost angrily.

"Who has been telling you to ask me that? What do you suspect me of?"

"Do stop, Sir William; I did not mean any harm."

But he had released his arm, and was gone, walking rapidly towards the house, which was just in sight. For a moment Nina stood irresolute, utterly confounded by his strange

conduct. The tears filled her eyes; she had had so much to bear lately that she had not much strength of nerve left. She struggled with her feelings, however, and followed at a slower pace. On the terrace in front of the house she was met by Mrs. Chester.

"What is the matter with Sir William, Nina? He has locked himself into the library, and says we are to have luncheon without him."

"I cannot tell you," she answered, "I don't understand it;" and then she recounted what had passed. Mrs. Chester asked no more questions, and seemed inclined to avoid the subject. Nina was more puzzled than ever, and, as soon as they left the dining-room, she went straight to Sir William's library. After knocking twice, the door was slowly opened, but as soon as she was admitted, he closed and locked it again, and, taking no notice of her, went back to his seat by the writing-table. Nina put one hand on his shoulder, and, bending down to him, said,—“I am so sorry I pained you. Do tell me what is the matter!”

He covered his face with both hands, but did not answer. She waited a minute, then,

kneeling down, gently tried to remove his hands, saying,—“If there is anything that troubles you, do let me try to remove it or, at any rate, help you to bear it.”

She was frightened at his haggard appearance, as he at last turned his face towards her. His eyes had a sort of burnt-out look, his mouth twitched convulsively, while with one hand he clutched nervously at the table-cloth, the buttons of his coat, anything that came within reach.

“Get up,” he said; “it is I who should kneel to you. I have committed a great sin. I have done you a grievous wrong by marrying you; but I was so blinded by my love that I never saw it plainly until to-day. Ask me no more, as you value my peace and your own.”

She saw he had some weight on his mind, but, out of pity, she refrained from asking any more. In his present state of agitation she felt it would be cruel to worry him with questions. So she went and fetched some wine, which she made him drink; and then, thinking he would rather be alone, she stepped through the window into the garden, and wandered about

the shrubbery, which stretched behind the house, her mind in a strange state of bewilderment.

“What had Sir William done that he seemed so full of remorse, and what could it have to do with her? Where was his mother? Was she dead or not?” She was sure Mrs. Chester knew something about it; but what she could not gain from her husband, she was too proud to seek for elsewhere. Oddly enough, she seemed more confused than troubled. The anguish of mind she had lately passed through made anything that could happen seem light in comparison. Just as the most deadly poisons are in sickness the most potent remedies, so one sorrow, if not cured, is much lightened by another treading fast upon its heels. None who have known great and repeated troubles but will acknowledge the truth of this assertion. Perhaps the mental, like the physical organism, cannot stand more than a certain amount of torture, and beyond that point becomes, for a time, mercifully insensible to further suffering.

CHAPTER XV.

The pleasures and delights, which mask
In treacherous smiles life's serious task,
What are they all ?

From the Spanish.

Sure if I reprehend anything in this world, it is the use
of my oracular tongue, and a nice derangement of epitaphs.

THE RIVALS.

GARDEN-PARTIES at Nympton Park were, on the whole, popular. Mr. and Mrs. Nowall's entertainments, like their conversation, conveyed to the mind, as they were intended to do, the impression that with them money was no object. Profusion and hospitality reigned; and so people the most fastidious were content to visit them, to laugh at their host's weak jokes, and listen politely to his wife's underbred chatter. O, that golden key! how it unlocks all hearts! The immortal poet might well exclaim, "What can it not do or undo?"

On the present occasion was staying with them a certain Sir Timothy Twirlwell, a guest whom they delighted to honour. For had he not received knighthood at the Queen's hands,

and was he not the owner of a handsome villa at Twickenham and some ten thousand per annum? Moreover, a widower, with no children. "It would be just the thing for Maria," her parents decided, as they talked over the subject; and Mrs. Nowall's maternal bosom swelled with pride at the thought of her daughter's future dignified position.

Sir Timothy himself fell comfortably into the trap prepared for him, and such a result was in the natural order of things. As Ovid wisely remarked, "Idleness is the parent of love"; and let any man and woman be thrown into each other's society for a week in a country house, with little else to do but amuse themselves, the result is inevitable, always provided that their natures are not absolutely at variance. At the end of that time they are sure to be in love, or imagine themselves so, which comes to pretty much the same thing.

Sir Timothy was a short stout man, of a somewhat oleaginous appearance. His mode of progression was so like a toddle that, in looking at him, one could not fail to be reminded of Tit-tat-tat-er-in-tan, the Chinaman of the nursery rhyme, whose "legs were so

short and feet so small, that he never could manage to walk at all." His whiskers, which were cut in the form of mutton-chops, were absurdly suggestive, so quizzical people said, of the trade by which he had made his money.

When Janet and her father arrived, Mrs. Nowall led Sir Timothy up to them, and having introduced him, inquired with great *empressement* for Sir William, and *dear* Lady Chester (since Nina's marriage her family had risen many grades higher in the estimation of her rich neighbours); she hoped they had enjoyed their "trip abroad." Janet replied that her sister was not very well, but she thought a few weeks in her native air would set her right.

"Not very well," said Mrs. Nowall, as they turned and followed the two gentlemen towards the field below the lawn where the targets were set up. "Well, to be sure, I'm sorry for that; perhaps,"—and here followed a *sotto voce* remark, which made Janet look very red and uncomfortable.

At this moment they were joined by a young lady, with a face like a good-natured cod-fish, and a figure of such remarkably

plump proportions as to remind one forcibly of a pouter pigeon. It was no other than Maria, the nymph of this modern Arcadia, and the joy and pride of her parents; she was to-day more radiant than usual, in a bright green silk dress, a shepherdess hat trimmed with red roses, and lemon-coloured gloves, so tightly buttoned that the pink wrists swelled above them in indignant remonstrance at the restraint put upon them. Still, on the whole, she was not a bad-looking girl; her expression of the most utter good-nature saved her from plainness, and if not very refined, she was an improvement on her mother, possessing a quality which in that lady was entirely lacking, viz., diffidence.

"I am so glad you are come," she said, shaking hands with Janet. "I was talking to Mr. Hunt, Sir William Chester's chaplain, you know, and he does say such odd things, I can't make out what he means sometimes, and I fancy he is laughing at me, you know, and I get so hot and wretched, and don't know what to answer. But what do you think of Sir Tim?"

"Who do you mean?" said Janet.

"Oh, Sir Timothy Twirlwell; we call him that for short, you know."

"You seem to have all Drawlingham here," said Janet, as they neared the rest of the party, and she was thus enabled to avoid answering the question as to Sir Timothy's personal appearance.

Maud Featherstone catching sight of Janet, came to meet her, saying, "You are well-come literally, my dear—that is to say, just in time to join us, for Mr. Norton and Mr. Hunt were proposing a game of croquet, and we want another lady, as Miss Nowall does not care to play."

"I shall be delighted; but where is Gertrude?"

"She is shooting. I really think it is the only amusement she is absolutely devoted to."

"And well she may be," said Mr. Norton, gazing admiringly at his sister-in-law elect, who had, seemingly without any effort, sent an arrow straight into the gold; "I believe she would beat any one here at fifty yards."

"What we excel in we generally like doing," said Mr. Hunt. "But shall we begin? Miss Trevor, will you venture on

me for a partner against Miss Featherstone and Mr. Norton?"

Mrs. Nowall having done her duty in welcoming her guests, and providing for their amusement, sought repose of body and refreshment of mind at one and the same time, by sinking into a chair at Miss Pickup's side.

"What a charming gathering!" said that lady, in a voice and with a smile far less tart than usual (generally she looked as if she had been nursed in infancy on vinegar, and nourished ever since on acidulated drops); but to-day there was something almost genial about her; the good work had, perhaps, been begun by the claret-cup and sparkling wine she had imbibed, but it certainly was completed by the sight of Mr. Trevor. He, poor man, was quite unconscious of his influence, and of the tremor excited in that virgin breast as he approached the two ladies.

He greeted Miss Pickup in the gentle, kindly tone he always used in speaking to women, whether they were young or old, rich or poor. She tried to blush, but unsuccessfully; however, she looked as if she thought she did, which, perhaps, answered the pur-

pose. "It is a surprise to see you here," she said. "I thought you would probably be at Rookwood."

Mr. Trevor was on the point of replying, when Mrs. Nowall interrupted. "Oh, he doesn't often refuse an invitation of mine. It does him good to come out a little bit. But have you had any refreshment, Mr. Trevor?"

Mr. Trevor answered that he was much obliged, but did not feel inclined for any just then; but Mrs. Nowall would take no denial, and beckoned to her husband, who came and bore off the Vicar to the tent, where were tables, not groaning (it is only in newspapers they do that), but laden with all sorts of delicacies, substantial or flimsy, for the sustenance of tired nature. Miss Pickup looked for a moment as if she would like to have snapped at her friend; but she recovered. "When is that affair coming off?" she said, nodding in the direction of Maud and her *fiancé*.

"Oh, that's more than I can tell," answered Mrs. Nowall; "and I doubt if anybody knows. At present he seems just as much devoted to Janet Trevor as to his betrothed."

"So he is," said Miss Pickup. "Just look at him holding the parasol over her while she is playing. If Maud Featherstone had any pride, she wouldn't stand it. I couldn't, I know."

"Ah, my dear," continued Mrs. Nowall, "girls have no proper feeling now-a-days. I am glad my Maria has been brought up differently. But as I was saying about Mr. Norton—I shouldn't be surprised to hear he had gone off on the wedding-day; he's just the sort of young man to do it. He is very like a gentleman I knew in Manchester, who was engaged to I don't know how many girls, one after the other. He used to wait till within a few weeks of the marriage, and then he would quietly tell his intended that he didn't care for her any longer; but, of course, if she insisted on it, he would keep to his engagement, knowing pretty well that, in her indignation, the girl was almost sure to give him his release; and he would then be free again to go and carry on the same game in another quarter, without any fear of an action for breach of promise, or damages to pay."

"Those lines," said Miss Pickup—

"The charming Lesbia has no mind they say,
I'll prove she has, it changes every day ;"

would find many more men than women to whom they might be applied, and truthfully. Ah ! my dear, they are inconstant, treacherous beings," with a half glance in the direction of the tent.

"Some are," rejoined Mrs. Nowall, qualifying her friend's sweeping remark.

"There are exceptions, of course," admitted Miss Pickup ; "but have you heard about the new Rector of Hilton ? Strange doings going on there, I believe. You would think, to see Mr. Meek, that butter would not melt in his mouth ; but there he has been setting the whole parish on fire. First of all, they were up in arms because he declared his intention of re-seating the church, and they could not, and would not, part with their pews ; and last week, at the harvest services, he was not content with filling the church with flowers, but actually had plates of fruit scattered about in all directions,—walnuts, apples, figs, and I don't know what else."

"Well, to be sure," said Mrs. Nowall; "that is going a little too far. I don't mind grapes and corn; but apples and nuts *are* rather extreme."

"And that's not the worst," said Miss Pickup; "he's been preaching to the people about confession, and has, if you'll believe it, induced one or two silly girls to go to him; and there's one young woman, a farmer's daughter, by name Jessie Wilson—" and here Miss Pickup's voice sank to a confidential whisper, inaudible to all except her friend.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed the latter.

"Yes; and I had it from a source on which I can rely," continued her informant; "for Mrs. Prater herself told me, and the girl is a sister of her own maid, only I wouldn't have you mention it for the world, as it was told me quite in confidence."

"Oh, you needn't fear, my dear; I never repeat things. Ah, Miss Janet! Are you tired? Here is a seat," making room for her at her side. "Well, Mr. Hunt, have you been victorious?"

"Witness our triumphant air, Mrs. Nowall.

We come to you bearing our 'blushing honours thick upon us.' Behold the enemy retreating," calling her attention to Maud and Mr. Norton, who were strolling towards the gardens. "But, as I was remarking," he said, turning to Janet, "although I am not in the least degree musical, and could no more intone a service than slay the Nemæan lion, or perform any other labour of Hercules, yet I am glad Lady Chester wishes to have music in the chapel, and will interest herself in it, for I understand enough to see that she knows what she is about. You, Miss Trevor, are also a good musician, I understand?"

"I am very fond of it," she answered, "and sing and play to amuse myself and my father; but I have not the same devotion, nor have I gone in for it so deeply as my sister. She was not content, as I have been, with practical knowledge; but when she was a mere child took up, of her own accord, the study of thorough-bass."

"You don't mean to say so, my dear!" interrupted Mrs. Nowall, who had been listening to the conversation. "Thorough-bass! She must find it very trying. Her chest is

not strong; and I shouldn't wonder, now I come to think of it, if that isn't the reason she used to get such attacks of hoarseness every now and then. No, no; to my mind we ought to be contented with the voices that are given us. I don't think women were ever meant to sing bass."

Janet retained her gravity better than Nina would have done under the circumstances; but she could not resist a sort of half-glance at Mr. Hunt. The expression of his face was inscrutable, and it was only by a sort of twinkle in his eye that she saw he appreciated the joke, as he said, with a serio-comic air, "You put it very forcibly, Mrs. Nowall, and should understand the subject so much better than I do, that I must be safe in saying I agree with you. But I must bid you good-bye now, I have a long ride."

"Oh, you are not to think of going yet, Mr. Hunt. I fully expect everyone to stay. We shall have something to eat in about half-an-hour—a mere cold *collision*, scarcely worthy the name of dinner. However, such as it is, I hope all will stay and partake of."

Mr. Hunt hesitated a moment, looked

towards Janet, and then succumbed. They were destined to have still further amusement out of Mrs. Nowall. On their way to the house she began to ask questions about the places Nina had visited on the Continent, the information being probably required with a view to the honeymoon of the future Lady Twirlwell. Mrs. Nowall's geographical knowledge was about as vague as that of the man who, when required to draw a map of Palestine, could only remember the names of two places, Jerusalem and Jericho. The former he put far north, among the mountains of Lebanon, the latter as far south, bordering on Arabia; thinking, at the same time, to display his Biblical knowledge, midway between the two he placed an "N.B. The spot where the man fell among thieves." And Mrs. Nowall knew where Paris was certainly, but very little beyond that. She did not, by any means, come up to Mrs. Malaprop's standard in her information regarding the *contagious* countries; the remarks, therefore, which she made freely were original, and inclined somewhat to the ludicrous, the names of towns, rivers, lakes, and mountains being jumbled

together in her head in a state of the most admired disorder.

CHAPTER XVI.

These puzzled souls of ours grow weak

With beating their bruised wings against the rim

That bounds their utmost flying, when they seek

The distant and the dim.

JEAN INGELOW.

DECEMBER had arrived, and Rookwood was full of visitors, some of whom intended to remain over Christmas. Lady Peyton was there with her husband and daughter, a girl about Janet's age. The Honourable Augusta Elton resembled her mother in appearance, but in mind and manners it was hard to trace any likeness, for while a long experience of the great world and its pleasures seemed to have had no power to chill Lady Peyton's warm heart, or alter her bright, kindly manner, her daughter's bearing was cold and reserved in the extreme. As girl or woman, she was one who would never be popular; few people could understand her, and yet her character was both a

strong and an uncommon one; her pride was of that noble sort which scorns anything mean, small, or dishonourable, and liking few people, yet where once she formed an attachment she was staunch and true as steel.

Dr. Merton had accepted Sir William's invitation, and was also at Rookwood as deep in the study of human nature as ever, and here he might find any amount of food for reflection. Altogether there were some odd characters gathered together; Gertrude Featherstone, for one, was a most uncommon combination of weakness and strength, of judgment and prejudice. Maud, in spite of Mrs. Nowall's prognostications, and Miss Pickup's sneers, is happily married. Mr. Norton's frail bark moored safely in the harbour of matrimony, his heart is no longer a pipe on which "Fortune's finger may play what tune she pleases." In a word, he takes to his new life kindly, and it would be a disgrace if he did not, for Maud makes the best little wife in the world; and in the future there appears for both of them every prospect of a life of respectable and placid happiness. They could not accompany Gertrude, being engaged to visit an

uncle of Mr. Norton's, a crabbed old bachelor, who never allowed it to be known to whom he intended to bequeath his wealth, and by this means contrived to keep all his relatives in order.

Janet was, for the time, a fixture at Rookwood, while Mr. Trevor spent as many of his days there as the parish would allow. Nina was much happier in society than when alone with her own thoughts, her husband, or Mrs. Chester. Although she did not often allow herself to give way to retrospection and regret, she yet dreaded the temptation of too much solitude; and Sir William ever since that miserable Sunday, although at the time he recovered himself, had now and then been subject to fits of depression, on which occasions he would shut himself up in his library, and refuse access even to Nina. She might, and did, try to shake off the oppressive thought that there was some dreadful secret weighing on her husband's mind, and one he dared not, or, at any rate, would not, let her share; but at times it haunted her almost unbearably, and if she had not been blessed with a temperament more than usually elastic, and a spirit

naturally happy and inclined to look at the bright side of things, the world must have suspected the existence of a care she now kept hidden even from her nearest relatives and most intimate friends.

It was a genuine old-fashioned winter, when icicles really "hung by the wall," and milk was very apt to come "frozen home in the pail"; but there was no appearance of anything but comfort in the large dining-room as Dr. Merton entered it, the first to be down on the morning after his arrival; logs were blazing on the hearth, and he could not be much too early, he thought, for the silver urn was already hissing on the table, while the footmen were coming to and fro, bringing in steaming dishes from the unknown regions. At this moment Nina entered, and greeted him with a bright smile of welcome. She might have been some beauty of the last century, he thought, in her picturesque costume of black velvet relieved by facings of deep crimson, and a quilted petticoat of the same warm colour.

"Alas!" she said, "I shall no longer have the satisfaction of feeling myself superior to my neighbours; for once, I am not the first down."

"You show some knowledge of the human heart there, Lady Chester. I know of no feeling more conducive for the time to self-satisfaction than the consciousness of having resisted an inclination to laziness. The question is whether the desire to shrink into oneself, and the humiliated sensation one has on coming in late at the breakfast-table, is not the more wholesome feeling of the two."

"We have not much to boast of this morning, at any rate," said Nina, as Lord Peyton and his daughter entered the room, quickly followed by the rest of the party.

"I am very glad you came, Merton," said Sir William, as they sat down to breakfast, "but I wish you could have brought Charley with you. It will scarcely seem Christmas at Rookwood without him. He is an extraordinary fellow. Whatever possessed him to sell out, and go abroad in that eccentric, sudden way, I cannot think. You are such friends. Did he never give you any reason for his odd proceedings?"

"Never," answered Dr. Merton, "except that he came to me to say good-bye; declared he was out of sorts, and wanted a change; and

I could well believe it, for he looked thoroughly ill. I had a letter from him a few weeks ago, the first since he left; it was written at Cairo. He seems to have been possessed by a spirit of unrest, and to have wandered from place to place without any particular object in view; but it is never fair to judge him by his own report. I am sure he is too good a fellow to allow his life to be as aimless as he would lead us to suppose. Every situation finds its duty, and, wherever he is placed, I am sure he will do it."

From the bottom of her heart thanking the urn which shielded her from observation, Nina struggled for composure; *she* knew full well what had made Charley an exile from his friends and country. He had doubtless felt that if he remained in England it would be impossible to resist the solicitations of Sir William, and to keep away from Rookwood.

"I was dreaming about him last night," said Lady Peyton. "How strange it is that so often the conversation at the breakfast-table seems but a continuation of one's sleeping thoughts of the night before. Do you believe, Dr. Merton, that dreams are ever prophetic?"

"I should not like to say that they are not sometimes sent us as warnings, for since the days of miracles we have too many well-authenticated proofs to the contrary; but they are generally so thoroughly without rhyme or reason, that I think none but the most credulous or superstitious would put much faith in them."

"It is related," said Lord Peyton, "that Pericles in a dream hit on a means of curing the injuries of a workman who had fallen from a great height in building the Athenian Capitol, and that in like manner Galen had remedies suggested to him; but what puzzles me often is the amazing activity of the mind in sleep. One goes through enough incidents sometimes in ten minutes to fill a whole week of real life."

"Not only time, but space," said Dr. Merton, "seems to be annihilated in that state, which Pliny describes as the retreat or withdrawing of the soul into itself. In real life, we may wish as much as we like; we have no cap of Fortunatus to transport us, at a moment's notice, to the other end of the earth. But in that ideal existence of dreamland, which has

been for ages the subject of so many scientific experiments and metaphysical investigations, there is no distance too great for the soul to travel in the space of one short hour."

"That is quite true," said Gertrude, who had been listening attentively. "I have myself, in one night, been to the West Indies, passed through numberless adventures there, and come back again. But I still fail to see how it is to be explained."

"It is, perhaps, more easy to give a reason for than you imagine," he answered, addressing himself to her. During the day we are constantly reminded of the flight of time, by the sun, by the striking of the clock, by weariness, by hunger; but asleep, we are under none of these influences, and the mind is so dead to any sense of time that if it were physically possible, like the sleeping beauty, to be lost to consciousness for a hundred years, it would be no more to us than a nap of ten minutes."

"I should think," said Nina, "you had been lately reading Tennyson's version of that charming fairy-tale. Don't you remember when the old king awoke,

And in his chair himself upreared,
And yawned, and rubbed his face, and spoke,
'By holy rood, a royal beard !
What say you ? We have slept, my lords,
My beard has grown into my lap.'
The barons swore, with many words,
'Twas but an after-dinner nap."

"What a head you have for poetry, Nina," said Lady Peyton. "You always seem to have something in your memory *à propos* of whatever subject is on the carpet."

"Who was it," said Gertrude, "who, when he was down-hearted, always cheered himself up with the ends of verses and sayings of philosophers? If Nina were given to low spirits, she would always have that remedy at hand, with such a number of saws at her fingers' ends."

"One would think I was like Sancho Panza, with his never-failing proverbs," said Nina. "Do let us change the subject. What are we to do with ourselves this morning?"

"If any of the ladies would like a ride," Sir William said, "the horses are at their disposal. No one need be afraid to mount either Selim or Brenda. My wife rides them both."

"Will not the roads be slippery?" asked Lord Peyton.

"The horses are rough-shod, and the Irford-mouth sands would be a very good place for a canter on such a day as this. They are fully three miles long, and the sea view is magnificent."

All the party being unanimously in favour of this plan, it was agreed that Lord Peyton should ride with his daughter and Janet, while Sir William drove Lady Peyton in the pony-carriage.

"Oh, Nina! Do you remember," said Janet, "the day we spent there, about a week before you were married,—when Sir William and Mr. Chester rode over to the Vicarage, and we all walked together to the beach; and what fun the boys had with the basket containing the luncheon, and how we enjoyed eating it on the rocks? And do you recollect the sort of parody Mr. Chester made of the water-babies? It was too bad, but he was so irresistibly comical, it was impossible to help being amused."

"He is a queer fellow," said Lord Peyton. "As a boy, he was the oddest commixture of

solidity and absurdity that one could well behold."

"We have actually got back to him again," said Sir William. "He ought to feel flattered."

"Did you never notice," said Dr. Merton, "that just before you get news of a person, or receive a letter from him, your mind is often haunted by thoughts of that same individual, as if through some invisible currents of sympathy his mind must be acting on yours? I see a smile on your face, Lady Peyton. You think I am getting into the domain of mysticism again, and I shall be accused of transcendentalism, or worse; but I should be sorry, as is the fashion in the present day, to believe nothing but what can be explained or accounted for, and so shut oneself out from the mystic wonderland of fancy. Do away with imagination, reduce everything to one dull, prosaic level of so-called reason and common-sense, and where would be the beauty of life? What a world we should have if your matter-of-fact Bœotians had it all their own way. I pity those who are so wedded to the real and actual, that anything in the shape of idealism

is looked upon as vain, silly dreaming. From the bottom of my heart I pity them."

"I won't attempt," said Lord Peyton, "to argue with you, although I don't exactly agree. I should be imprudent to do so, where from rustiness of weapons more than weakness of cause, I should inevitably get the worst of it. After all, you are not so severe as Carlyle when he comes down upon the unbelievers in the mysterious. 'Who are you,' he says, 'who approach him you dare to call a delirious mystic, with snuffing charity, protrusively offering thy hand-lamp (of logic), and shriek as one injured when he kicks his foot through it, *Armer Teufel?*'"

"Don't you think," said Nina, addressing Lady Peyton, "that we should be prudent to retire? They are getting so far out of our depth, that we stand a chance, if we stay any longer, of being drowned in a sea of metaphysics."

"Quite so, my dear; by all means let us make our escape. If I must die from submersion, I should, like Clarence, prefer a butt of Malmsey."

CHAPTER XVII.

Where have ye all this time bene wand'ring,
Where bene weft ?

THE FAERIE QUEEN.

AFTER the riding-party had started, Gertrude, entering the library, and finding a philosophical work of Hegel's on the table, which she conjectured rightly to have been left there by Dr. Merton, sat herself down in a corner with the book in her hand, and set her brains to work to understand it. Though her reading had been more deep and varied than that of most girls of her age, it had not included any treatise on psychology such as the one before her. When books of the sort came in her way, she had always hitherto, with the contempt of ignorance, set them aside as unpractical and visionary. But to-day a new chord had been struck; some of the things Dr. Merton said had impressed her strongly, and she wanted to know something of the causes which made him so different from any one she had ever met. So there she sat reading, unmindful of the flight of time, and so absorbed in the book as

not to notice that the owner of it had entered the room.

He stood watching her for some minutes; then, after making a slight movement to attract her attention, he said,—“Pardon me; it is so unusual to find a young lady prefer the dull company of a book to a canter on the sands that I concluded you were riding with the others; but I will not interrupt you. I merely came to fetch something I left here last night,” as he glanced over the table.

“I think this must be what you are looking for,” rejoined Gertrude, handing him the volume she had been reading.

“Pray, keep it,” he replied. “But is it possible you find that kind of reading amusing?”

“Scarcely to be called amusing. I have never opened a book of the kind before, and there are many parts I don’t understand, but still I like it. It makes one think, and I suppose that is something gained.”

“You are quite right,” he answered; “one solid subject well digested is of more benefit to the intellect than a large amount of that easy reading it is no effort to take in, and which gives the mind no exercise. Did you

never hear what Hobbes once said, when comparing himself with other men?—‘If I had read as many books, I should be as ignorant as they are.’”

“But I suppose,” said Gertrude, who had become unusually humble in expressing an opinion, “no general rule could be laid down to guide individual cases in the choice of reading; for do not the tinge and character of people’s minds vary quite as much as the colour of their hair and eyes?”

“Certainly,” replied Dr. Merton; “human nature is so diverse, that it is impossible to have a fixed standard for anything; and that is what angers me so when I hear people judging their neighbours, and laying down the law as to what is right and what wrong, as if it were possible for one man to decide for another. Even in questions of morality, I believe what is absolute sin for one individual, in another, differently constituted, is perfectly innocent, or, at the worst, only to be looked upon as a weakness.”

“How things work in together!” said Gertrude. “It was only yesterday I was reading a remark of old Dr. Mason’s on the same sub-

ject. He said, 'As much grace as would make St. John a saint would barely keep St. Peter from knocking a man down.'

"Who is that talking of knocking a man down?" said Nina, coming through a small door which led from the drawing-room. "The conversation seems to be getting dangerous. I think Dr. Merton would be wise to retreat."

"No, I assure you, Lady Chester," he said, rising, and giving her a chair, "we have been having a most profitable discussion."

"I am glad to hear it. It has been very good for my friend's mind, I am sure; but it is my duty to look after her physical well-being, and I am not going to allow her to sit in-doors on such a day as this. Come with me into the village, Gertrude. If Dr. Merton will accompany us, you may continue your conversation, and, whether pugnacious or profitable, I promise not to interrupt it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Die Engel, die nennen es Himmelsfreud,
Die Teufel, die nennen es Höllandleid,
Die Menchen, die nennen es—Liebe.

H. HEINE.

ON the same night at dinner, after the soup had been removed, a servant brought Dr. Merton a folded slip of paper. As he took it from the salver, and glanced at the contents, he said,—“May I ask you to excuse me, Lady Chester? A friend of mine has called, and is waiting in the library to see me.”

“By all means,” said Nina. “But pray beg him to come and join us.”

“Thank you; I will ask him,” he replied, as he left the room.

On entering the library, he seized both the visitor's hands, exclaiming,—“Why Charley, dear old boy, I *am* glad to see you! But what is to be the next move by way of astonishing your friends? Here have we been all this time picturing you among the Pyramids, on the banks of the Ganges, anywhere in the world rather than in our own immediate

neighbourhood. But why was I not to tell who it was?"

"Another of my whims, my dear fellow. I did not want to disturb the party till they had eaten their dinner in peace. And now you go back to yours; and when my cousin has had his last glass of port, you may tell him that his unworthy relative is not, as he supposes, some two or three thousand miles away, but is actually in his own library, singing *dulce domum* to the spiders. But, joking apart, it would not be prudent to come upon him suddenly, for he has been subject to nervous attacks, and the doctors say any extra excitement or sudden shock is bad for him; so you see there is as much wisdom as whim this time in my arrangements."

"It is all very well," was the answer, "but you must come and have some dinner. What am I to say to Lady Chester? She told me to bring my nameless friend back with me."

"Say the truth: that your friend has dined at the inn in Drawlingham, and that he would rather wait in the library till you have done. If you like to add that he is of a shy, nervous temperament, you may."

"Dr. Merton's friend must be as eccentric as himself," said Nina to Lady Peyton, when they entered the drawing-room. "I don't like his being left so long alone."

"Somebody thinks her character as hostess is at stake," said Lady Peyton, in the caressing manner with which she usually addressed Nina.

"It is not that altogether, but I don't think it seems kind. I think I must go and beard the lion in his den. I can ask him to join the gentlemen in the dining-room. Perhaps the thought of facing so many ladies frightened him, and he will not mind now we have retired from the scene."

The library, with its single reading-lamp, seemed to Nina almost dark after the brilliant light of the room she had left. Advancing timidly to the figure seated at the fire-side, she said,—“Dr. Merton is giving his friend, I am sure, a bad impression of country hospitality in allowing him to remain here so long.” She started at the vehemence with which the supposed stranger sprang to his feet and seized her hand, saying, as he held it fast,—“Nina, don't be frightened. I ought not to

have come, I know, but I could not keep away any longer; I felt that I must see you again. I hope you are not angry with me. I will not stay longer than you choose. But, in all my wanderings, I have had no news of you; and my whole life has seemed so sad and solitary, so cold and colourless. And now to see you again, to hold your hand in mine, to hear your voice once more, it is too much!"

We know, critical reader, what you will say. To be a model heroine, of the correct, refrigerator type, she should have started back, and, with an offended air, have reminded him of their relative positions, and of the imprudence, not to say wickedness, of his being there at all. But she was nothing but a warm-hearted, impulsive girl, who, though possessing good principles, was often led away by the strength of her feelings. The hand which he held trembled in his, and she did not attempt to withdraw it. Her first sensation was one of unmitigated happiness, and, for a moment, everything else was forgotten in the pleasure of seeing him again. She was so taken by surprise, and had so little time to consider, that, thinking of it calmly afterwards, she was

glad, for her own self-respect's sake, that Dr. Merton, having broken the news to Sir William, had quickly entered the room, and borne off his friend to receive the greetings and reproaches which awaited him in the dining-room.

Great was the surprise of the ladies when Nina, having collected her scattered thoughts, and regained as far as possible her usual manner, returned and told them that their mysterious guest was no other than the wanderer whose absence they had at the breakfast-table so warmly lamented. The only one who seemed unmoved by the information was Janet, who only glanced suddenly up, and then bent more closely over her work.

"I shall really begin to believe in some of Dr. Merton's weird notions," said Lady Peyton. "It is, to say the least of it, the oddest coincidence that our minds should have been running so much on him to-day, when he was actually, unknown to us, on his journey here."

"Dr. Merton frightens me," said Janet. "There seems something almost uncanny about him."

"I expect," said Gertrude, "it oftens happens that men look upon him as mad and visionary simply because his mind is so much deeper and his soul so far above theirs that they cannot understand him. It is generally the best and most unworldly part of us that society is pleased to dub our insanity."

"You seem to have been inspired with a profound respect on a very short acquaintance," replied Janet.

"Do not," said Nina, "nip in the bud that new quality of veneration I am pleased to see developing in our friend; but I shall not in the future," she continued, mischievously, "be astonished at any change I see in her. Fancy the matter-of-fact Gertrude being beguiled into the cloud-land of metaphysics, psychology, or whatever it was, and kept there for the space of two hours! literally, my dear," as Gertrude tried to remonstrate, "it was exactly twelve o'clock when I disturbed your *tête-à-tête*."

"How deep that man seems to dig in the world of speculation!" said Lady Peyton. "He appears to arrive constantly at things no one else ever dreamt of. He gives so many reasons, too, to prove the truth of his ideas,

that, however wild they are, one can scarcely help being convinced. I listened to him yesterday talking to my husband. He contended that souls in a future state were allowed to enter other bodies and people new worlds; and he enlarged upon this, quoting as authorities not only philosophers of ancient times, but referring to the works of many of the Fathers of the Church, till I almost trembled at the strangeness of some of the notions he put forward; and yet there was nothing one dared to say was unorthodox, only the novelty of his views startled one."

"Very dangerous ground that," issued in measured tones from the lips of Mrs. Chester, who was seated in the corner of a couch, engaged in the manufacture of children's socks destined for a bazaar in aid of the Female Mission. She continued knitting in a deliberate and dignified manner as she spoke. "I fear for Dr. Merton's faith. It is but a step from speculation to scepticism."

"I allow," said Lady Peyton, "that for some minds it might be dangerous; but no one can know Dr. Merton as I do, and observe the consistency of his life, and the way in which

he works for his fellow-creatures, without feeling assured that there is nothing to be feared for him. He is one in a thousand."

' "What are works without faith? We are told—"

The entrance of the gentlemen created a diversion, and so the rest of Mrs. Chester's discourse remained, for the time, in the depths of her own mind, to be produced on a future occasion with notes and appendix.

Sir William, whose arm was on Charley's shoulder, would scarcely give him time to speak to the other ladies before leading him up to Nina, saying,—“What do you think this restless fellow is proposing? Not contented with frightening us half out of our senses by arriving in this unexpected manner, he now declares he must be off again directly—will only stop over to-morrow. It is absurd.”

“You see,” said Charley, “my strong sense of the proprieties of life would not allow me to accept an invitation, unless”—(with a wistful glance at Nina)—“unless endorsed by the lady of the house.”

Nina, angry with herself for caring so much, and annoyed with him for throwing the de-

cision upon her, made some coldly polite reply, and moved away to the music-room, where Lord Peyton was already opening the piano.

CHAPTER XIX.

This sorrow shown,
By your tears shed,
Would have this lecture read,
That things of greatest, so of meanest worth,
Conceived with tears are, and with tears brought forth.

ROBERT HERRICK.

ON the next evening, shortly before dinner, Sir William coming into Nina's dressing-room, and saying he wished to speak to her, she dismissed her maid, and sat down, prepared, by the expression of his face, for a remonstrance upon some subject, possibly a lecture. After nervously playing for a few moments with the ornaments on the mantel-piece, he began,—
“My dear Nina, what has Charley done that you behave to him so strangely? You used to be very good friends, and yet last night you did not seem in the least glad to see him; and the whole of to-day I noticed you scarcely

vouchsafed him a word. I think it displays a want of proper feeling towards *me*," he continued, waxing warm with his subject. "I certainly thought you would show common civility to my relations. I know Charley is odd, and unlike other people; but he can't help that."

"He is very unlike other people," replied Nina.

"I wish he would marry, and settle down," continued the Baronet.

"I wish he would," she said, half to herself; "it would be the best thing."

"But, in the mean time, Nina, whatever your feelings may be, I hope you will, for my sake, make your manner a little more cordial."

On receiving the required promise, Sir William retired, and Nina, left alone, sank back into the corner of the easy-chair in which she sat, and covered her face with her hands while the scalding tears trickled through her fingers. "No one's lot," she thought, "could be cast in so crooked a mould as hers. Here was Sir William blaming her for the very conduct which, if he knew the truth, he would most have commended. There was Charley

himself pained at the manner she was obliged to assume, and worse than all was the conflict in her own heart,—such a warm, tender, loving one, obliged to appear so cold, and such an honest, straightforward nature, compelled to live on one point a life of dissimulation! What wonder that her heart was heavy, and that she felt inclined to give up the contest, so hard did the battle for the right seem to grow! But her good angel was near, sent to encourage and strengthen her failing resolution; and as she thought of her mother's early lessons, of her father's love and confidence, she felt she must persevere in the course she had set before her, and not swerve or turn back. After all, if life seemed sometimes almost harder than she could bear, rest would come some day, and a time when she would see the reason for it all,—when the tangled threads of her existence would be unravelled and wound up, and everything in the past, however complicated at the time it seemed, would to her clearer intelligence become plain."

As she tried to solace herself with these thoughts, a knock was heard at the door, and Janet's voice said,—“May I come in? But

what is the matter?" as she knelt by her sister's side, and kissed her wet cheek. "You are not well, I am certain. Don't come to dinner, lie down instead. I'll make all the proper excuses for you."

"It is nothing," said Nina. "I shall be all right directly; don't worry about me, dear," as she met Janet's troubled glance. "I am foolish sometimes. Give me that bottle of eau-de-Cologne and some water, and my eyes will soon be respectable again."

"I shall not consider that will make you fit for society. You are altogether out of sorts, and really cannot appear to-night. You must do as I proposed."

"My dear," said Nina, kissing her, and speaking in her usual manner, "I mean to live up to the character of wilfulness we are supposed, as women, to possess, you know. 'Tell her she can't, she will; tell her she must, she won't.' But as Janet still knelt by her side, looking anxious, and not by any means satisfied with the lightness of manner she felt sure was assumed, Nina wound her arms around her sister's neck, and pressed her cheek to hers, as, with eyes fixed on the fire, she said,

—"I see it is of no use, I cannot deceive you. I *am* very sad. I try hard to think it is for the best, but sometimes it seems as if everything goes wrong with me. I wish from my heart I could tell you all, dear; but I must not. Yet even this much confidence and the assurance of your love and sympathy are a relief. Oh, Janet, how happy we used to be together! But I am not going to be sentimental," she added, recovering herself; "and don't, dear, hint to papa the possibility of my being anything but what he supposes me—perfectly contented and happy."

When Sir William got an idea into his head, he was apt, like a terrier with an old shoe, to turn, and twist, and worry it in every conceivable fashion, refusing obstinately to let it go. At present, and with some show of reason, he was troubling about Charley's eccentricities, and the nomadic and aimless life he had been leading. He never could quite get it out of his head that Charley was a school-boy still, who should be guided and led by him in all the affairs of life, both small and great. The object of this solicitude could not but feel the diatribes to which he was subjected somewhat

provoking ; for, without being conceited, it was impossible for him not to be conscious that his own judgment in most matters was more to be depended on than his cousin's.

In the course of the evening, Sir William, getting Charley into a corner of the drawing-room, where they were not likely to be interrupted, attacked him again. "You had really better make up your mind to stop," he began. "I cannot think why you are in such a hurry. You know the Peytons leave us to-morrow, and we shall want you all the more when they are gone."

"You are very good to wish to keep me," replied Charley; "but I think I ought to be elsewhere."

"What compulsion can there be in the matter? You have (so much the worse) seemingly no object in life, and what can there be to call you elsewhere? What do you mean to do with yourself when you do leave us? Idle away the days at your Club, probably."

"I am thinking of going about the country, with my fiddle for a companion, and my only luggage a knapsack. It would be a refreshingly new experience to eat without plates or

dishes, and to sleep under a haystack. The idea ought to meet with your approval, for it would be an active life enough, if I chose to make it so. What do you say to thirty miles a day?"

"You are talking nonsense again," exclaimed Sir William, testily. "When are you going to act like other people? I wish to goodness you would marry. There might be some chance then, perhaps, of your caring about things. Every one says you ought to. I was talking to my wife about it only last night, and she quite agrees with me."

"Nin—Lady Chester said that!" exclaimed Charley, for the moment startled out of his self-control. "Was she so good as to say she wished it?"

"Of course, for my sake, and because she knew I was anxious, it was naturally her desire."

Charley turned away, saying to himself,—
"It is quite true, I have been very wrong, though not in the way he thinks. If I live, she shall see I am not quite so weak and selfish as I must seem to her now."

At breakfast-time the next morning he

announced his intention of accepting Lord Peyton's invitation, and going with them to their place in Devonshire; and before the afternoon they had started, leaving behind them the blank which usually succeeds the departure of friends, but which is always so evanescent. It is not a pleasant thought this, that even those who love us most, after we have said good-bye to them, very soon cease to miss us, or to feel that there is a something gone out of their lives; and when we have uttered our last farewell, when we are sleeping our last sleep, it will be the same,—missed and regretted, doubtless, for a little while, but very soon other ties and new affections are formed; and if you or I, my friend, could come back while our loving relatives are still shrouded with crape in supposed mourning for our loss—if, I say, we could return and visit the home which once knew us so well, we should find 'by the fireside, at the table, even in the hearts of many friends, the niche we once occupied so well filled, that, although to those who loved us our appearance might give joy, they would be puzzled to know what to do with us. And is it not well that it should be so? We are not meant to go mourn-

ing all our days. Is it not one of the greatest blessings we possess to be so constituted that, while in our minds the impression of past happiness remains, its charm heightened, if anything, by memory, all experiences of sorrow, on the contrary, if not forgotten, are by time softened and diminished in their intensity?

Nina's life during the next few days was none of the pleasantest, Sir William being so irritable and fidgetty that it was as much as she could do to keep things straight with their guests. He was vexed with Charley for going, and could not forgive Nina for having, as he declared, driven him away. When they were alone, he never gave her a minute's peace, but was perpetually recurring to the same subject, till it was almost too much for her naturally impatient temperament to brook. Perhaps the consciousness that she was utterly unable to feel any of the love which as a wife she owed him, made her try to compensate for it by extra gentleness; and it was marvellous the way she bore with his temper, or with what was almost worse, his fits of gloom and depression, which seemed to be on the increase.

Fortunately, Gertrude and Dr. Merton, becoming daily more absorbed in each other's society, did not notice that anything was wrong. Janet, Nina did not so much mind, while Sir William always brightened when with Mr. Trevor.

About a week after Charley's departure, the following epistle was received from him:—

“DEAR SIR WILLIAM,—The Liberal member for Easingwold having lately, through the death of his father, gone up higher in the legislature of this our noble country, and, as Marquis of Cackleton, taken his seat in the House of Lords, I have been persuaded to become a candidate for the vacant place. Lord Peyton promises his support, which is as good as putting the borough into my hands, as the greater part of it belongs to him, and votes here, as elsewhere, are greatly influenced by secondary considerations. I shall thus lose the excitement of a contest, but, at the same time, its attendant disagreeables.

Lord Peyton is, I am afraid, too sanguine about me, and has made up his mind that I shall distinguish myself. This I cannot promise,

but I really intend to work, and for the future take *non sibi sed patriæ* for my motto.

"I hope all this will be satisfactory to you, and that although in politics we don't agree, you will consider the rôle I have chosen more suitable than that of a strolling-player. I am not sure myself, though, that I should not find the latter more entertaining. Good-bye. My kind regards to Lady Chester, and a happy Christmas to all.

"Yours, &c.,

"CHARLES CHESTER."

CHAPTER XX.

Time flies, and bears away our woes,
And as its shadowy train departs,
The memory of sorrow grows
A lighter burden on the heart.

W. C. BRYANT.

Two years have passed away, and time has on its wings brought many changes. Maria Nowall has for more than a twelvemonth supported, with becoming dignity, the title of

Lady Twirlwell. She is now staying at Nympton Park, with her husband and daughter, a plump baby, with no features, and not any shape in particular, but the very idol of her grand-parents. Mrs. Nowall declares that the darling is the moral image of what her mamma was at her age; and we can better believe this than the other favourite assertion of that lady, as to the cherubic nature of the infant.

The friendship between Gertrude and Dr. Merton, begun at Rookwood, soon ripened on both sides into a warmer feeling, and, before his return to London, it was arranged, with her parents' consent, that the wedding should take place in the spring. When Nina asked how all her former ideas on the subject of matrimony came to be so subverted, her only answer was,—“I had not seen *him* then, and I never believed that out of the pages of fiction there existed any one so wise and yet so good.”

As a wife, Gertrude is a much pleasanter, a far gentler, and more attractive specimen of womanhood, than she ever bid fair to be. Contact with a mind superior to her own has widened her views of life, and taught her, at

the same time, the humility which was so wanting in her character. If she had married a man not possessing the power to command her respect, she would have developed into another such woman as her mother, carrying her strength of mind and downrightness to excess. But now her power of will has resulted in a well-managed household, while her energy finds vent in the congenial employment of assisting her husband in the translation from the German of some deep philosophical works which he is preparing for the press.

Let us take a look at Nympton Vicarage, and see what changes have taken place there since our first introduction to its inhabitants, nearly three years ago. It is a raw cold January afternoon, and Mr. Trevor has been persuaded by his daughters not to go out. Nina is staying at her old home for two days, and, her wish being as potent with her father as it ever was, when she drew the largest easy-chair up to the drawing-room fire, telling him to make himself comfortable, and bringing him the *Times*, which she always contrived should be sent on from Rookwood, he obeyed most

dutifully, only making one condition, that she should go and play to him.

Mr. Trevor looks a younger and a happier man than before his daughter's marriage, for she has managed, almost without his knowing it, to remove from his path many a wearing care and petty anxiety. Nina is as lovely and almost as bright as ever; and, to a stranger, her manner might seem almost more winning than formerly, for she is less rash in expressing an opinion of things and people, and she has gained that finished grace which nothing but frequent contact with society gives.

Charley Chester has not been at Rookwood since his short visit and abrupt departure two years ago; and even in town he has so studiously kept out of their way, that they have never met. Sir William has not yet given up reproaching Nina on the subject; but she is getting accustomed to it now, and minds it less; for though the past is not forgotten, the thoughts of it are buried so deep in her heart, that their existence is scarcely acknowledged even to herself. During the last twelve months she has known more happiness than she

ever dared hope could be hers at Rookwood. A small hand has been sent to lighten the burden which life with Sir William and Mrs. Chester certainly was; and the exquisite joy she experienced in the thought of that young life dependent upon hers, left no room for discontent or useless vain regrets. On her boy, besides his share of love, she lavished all the fondness she would, if she could, have given to her husband. For the latter, the indifference she felt was only kept from turning to dislike by the pity, not unmixed with contempt, with which she regarded his frequent exhibitions of weakness and temper, which were constantly recurring, try as she would to avoid in speaking or acting anything that could irritate him.

After playing for a few minutes, Nina stopped to listen to what was sweeter music in her ears, viz., the pitter-patter of small feet in the nursery overhead, where Miss Elsie, with all the importance imaginable, was giving her small nephew his first lessons in deportment, and by the inducement of an orange (chosen as a motive power suited to his tender years) trying to convince him of the superiority of an

upright mode of progression over the crawling motion, which was his favourite way of getting from place to place. "I hope he will not fall," said the young mother, who judged from the sounds the sort of amusement that was going on above.

"What an anxious tone of voice," said Mr. Trevor, looking up with a smile. "I do not think much harm can come to him with Jane and his own nurse keeping guard, and Janet, in all probability, worshipping as well. I am afraid Master Arthur stands a very fair chance of being spoilt between us all."

"Now, papa, I won't have you say that," answered Nina, coming to her old place on a stool by his side. "I don't mean to indulge him; and if I did, I am quite sure it would do him no harm. With all his spirit, he is so sweet and loving, his fits of temper never last more than a minute; and if I happen to be sad, or out of sorts, or anything is the matter, I am sure he knows it, for he puts his sweet lips to mine, or nestles his face into my neck, trying, in his way, to say how much he cares for me."

Mr. Trevor watched her glowing cheek and

sparkling eye, as she talked on and on, recounting the numberless perfections of her boy ; and he thought what new life and beauty this love seemed to have given her. "We have got on the inexhaustible topic," he said, when at last she stopped. "What a child you are yourself still, Nina!"

"I don't feel like one," she replied. "Do you know, papa, I shall be twenty very soon?"

"Really. What an alarming age! You are quite sure you are so old?"

"Now, papa, you are in a teasing mood this afternoon, and, to punish you, I have a great mind to go away, and not talk to you any longer."

"That is only an excuse to be off to the nursery, I know; but bring the baby here, my dear; don't banish yourself."

In a few minutes she returned with Master Arthur in her arms. "Is it not disgraceful?" she said. "Just look what he has done." There was nothing to be seen of the culprit but a roguish face peeping out from a cloud of his mother's hair. He had managed, on the way, to extract some hairpins, and to pull down quite enough to envelope him.

"I see it is not the first time he has performed that feat," said Mr. Trevor, as the child crowed and laughed in conscious triumph.

"No; but it is a game I only allow generally in my dressing-room," replied Nina, as, with a final hug, she deposited her burden on the rug. "I was taken by surprise to-day."

"How proud she would have been of him!" said Mr. Trevor, half to himself, as he looked fondly on the child.

Nina knew he spoke of her mother, but she only replied by a look of sympathy and a loving pressure of his hand.

"You are a good child, darling," he continued, "and, as far as could be, have made up to me for her loss; only when I get you at home, it makes it all the harder to part with you. Must you leave us to-morrow?"

"I expect Sir William will send the carriage for me, and I shall have to go; but surely, father dear, you can come too? Sir William will be delighted; it always does him good to have you there."

"It is a great temptation; but if I consent it must only be for one night, as I have to be back on Thursday."

“To attend, I expect, one of those edifying vestry-meetings, which used to send you home with an expression of countenance almost equal in resignation to that Mrs. Chester puts on when I am what she calls self-willed—meaning, you understand, that I don’t happen to see things exactly with her eyes.”

“She is undoubtedly a conscientious woman; but she would be a much pleasanter one,” said Mr. Trevor, “if she had not taken out a judge’s patent for herself, and were not so hard upon those who don’t agree with her,—poor Mr. Meek, for instance. When I hear the severe judgments some even of the very best people pass upon their neighbours, I often think of what St. Augustine said to a devout woman, who was inclined to look down upon those whom she thought less holy than herself. ‘I would to God,’ he said, ‘that you were guilty of the same faults of which you are so willing to believe others capable. You would be nearer the kingdom of heaven; for then, at least, there would be some humanity about you.’”

“I am sure it does not speak well for people themselves,” said Nina, “when they are

inclined to impute the worst motives to their neighbours."

"There is much truth in that," replied her father. "I always find it difficult to believe in those who do; for is it not the hypocrite who is most likely to look upon intense devotion as assumed? And, going further down in the scale of morality, the man who has been leading a bad or vicious life, always finds it hard to believe in the purity or good intentions of others."

"You remind me," answered Nina, "of what Lady Blessington once said to Lord Byron, that as a clear and spotless mirror reflects the brightest image, so is goodness ever most prone to see good in others; and as a sullied mirror shows its own defects in all that it reflects, so does an impure mind tinge all that passes through it."

"My own rough thoughts expressed exactly," said Mr. Trevor; "and in much more poetical language than I could have clothed them. But here is Janet; I thought she would not be happy long without this young autocrat."

"You are just come in time to be useful,

my sweet sister," said Nina. "Do fasten up this hair for me. I am not fit to be seen, and have been every moment in a state of apprehension lest some one should call."

"No, my dear; let it alone," said Mr. Trevor. "I am quite of baby's opinion, that it suits you much better than the elaborate coiffure that French maid of yours must spend so much time over."

"But you don't mind it really, father dear, do you? I am obliged to be, as Maria says, *à la mode*, and to dress more than I know you like; but Sir William will have it so."

"My dear, I am not finding fault for a moment. Of course your first duty in such small matters is to please your husband; but I wanted to ask you just now, have you heard from Mr. Chester lately?"

"Not since the announcement of his engagement three months ago," said Nina, moving to the couch, with the child, who had fallen asleep, in her arms, laying him down, and throwing a warm rug over him.

"I must confess I was astonished to hear it," said Mr. Trevor. "Miss Elton is not the sort of girl I should have thought he would

choose. I hope it is not a *mariage de convenance*; but it is undoubted that the influence such an alliance will bring him in his political career is immense. He seems already to be making a name for himself. That was a telling speech of his last session. I am very glad his powers of mind are applied to some purpose. I always used to wish it were possible to rouse his dormant energies. I saw from the first he had more than usually falls to the lot of mortals, both in the way of sense and force of character, although he took such pains to disguise both. When is he coming to this part of the world again?"

"He works very hard, I hear," said Nina, who was half-sitting, half-kneeling by the side of the couch, watching her child's slumbers, and holding his tiny hand in hers. "I believe he writes political articles for one of the leading papers."

"But when he is married," replied Mr. Trevor, "he will surely give himself a holiday. I suppose you will ask him to bring his wife to Rookwood?"

Nina did not answer; but bent over the couch till her cheek rested against the silky

curls on the small head nestling into the pillow, and Janet being also unusually silent, Mr. Trevor instinctively dropped the subject.

CHAPTER XXI.

Is it the brooding night?
Is it the shivery creeping in the air?
That makes the home so tranquil and so fair,
O'erwhelming to my sight?

MRS. HEMANS.

THE next evening, during a pause in the consultation Sir William was holding with Mr. Trevor, as to the advisability of renewing the lease on some property which had lately fallen into his hands, Nina, who was looking over the periodicals on the drawing-room table, said,—
“Oh, papa, you have not seen the *Argus* this month; there is an article in it by Dr. Merton. It looks dreadfully dry—something about the hereditary transmission of physical and mental imperfections.”

“I have been before-hand with you this time, my dear; for I saw it in the reading-room at Drawlingham.”

"That is rather a hard law," said Nina, as she read. "He seems to say it is positively wrong for people whose parents have died of consumption to marry. The remarks on the subject of insanity are reasonable enough,—that seems to me a very different thing to mere physical weakness."

"Like most other questions, there are two sides to it," said Mr. Trevor; "but in a case of madness there can be only one opinion. No man of any principle would willingly or knowingly entail such a curse upon his offspring—perhaps on future generations."

Sir William rose suddenly, and, grasping convulsively Mr. Trevor's arm, exclaimed excitedly, and with eyes nearly starting from their sockets,—“What will you say, sir, when I tell you that my mother died mad, and I knew it?”

He was gone before either of his hearers could recover from their surprise sufficiently to speak.

Mr. Trevor turned to Mrs. Chester as if for an explanation. "I really don't see," said that lady, calmly, "why he distresses himself. His mother was certainly a little odd at times, nothing more."

With a sigh of relief, Nina went to her father, who was standing by the fire, clasped her hands over his arm, and laid her head on his shoulder. "I was so frightened," she said. "I began to imagine all sorts of dreadful things."

"I was startled, too, for a moment, darling; but you see it is nothing—only one of the nervous fits you have told me Sir William is subject to. I have no doubt to-morrow he will be himself again."

At ten o'clock, Nina, after saying good-night, went to her husband's dressing-room door; but the only answer she could get to her repeated knocks was,—“Go away—go to bed. I wish to be alone.” With a sigh she turned towards the nursery, where she was sure to find comfort in the sight of her boy.

“How well he looks, nurse,” she said, as she drew back the muslin curtain of his cot. “I think the change to Nympton has done him good.”

“I am sure it has, my lady. Look what a lovely colour he's got in his dear cheeks.”

And they might well stand looking at the babe in his snowy nest. He was a picture of infantile beauty, such as only the chisel of a

Chantrey could portray or the pen of a poet describe. A perfect cherub he looked as he lay with one dimpled arm thrown above his head, in an attitude of the most perfect repose.

Nina could scarcely tear herself away,—she showered soft kisses upon him, inhaled his sweet breath, and felt almost envious of the very pillow and clothes which lay so near his tender limbs. At last, with one long, loving embrace, and a silent prayer breathed over him, she turned away, saying,—“It is too bad to keep you up so long, nurse. I wish I might have the cot in my room. He is always quiet at night, is he not?”

“Always, my lady, as good as gold; but all gentlemen is alike—leastways they that ever I set eyes on. They never will believe that the dear, precious infants can sleep, and so the farther away by night the better. Why, Master Arthur, bless his heart! he never moves till morning, and then he don’t cry, but sits up in his little cot, a-playing all to himself, and cooing like a little king as he is.”

Nina stopped at Sir William’s door in passing, but she could hear nothing except a restless

footstep pacing to and fro, and now and then a stool or chair kicked impatiently out of the way. She knew it was useless to attempt to influence him, for in these moods he was always most unpersuadable, and it was not the first time he had spent the night locked either in his dressing-room or the library.

On these dark January mornings, Nina, who was always an early riser, usually began to dress before daylight; and it had become the custom for little Arthur, as soon as he was dressed, to be brought in to play on the rug before the fire while she finished her toilette. But the next day, when Nina opened the door in answer to the nurse's knock, she said,—“I am sorry, my lady, that I couldn't bring baby; but he is not awake yet. He is sleeping so sound, little darling, that I hadn't the heart to rouse him.”

“You are quite right, nurse. I am nearly dressed, and will come into the nursery in a minute. Sleeping still?” said Nina, a few moments later, as she passed through the day-nursery.

“Yes, my lady; indeed he is lazy. But if you are going in, I will draw up the blind; it

is getting quite light now, and that is sure to waken him."

Nina went to the snug corner where the child lay, and put her lips to the small hand which rested on the quilt. "Oh, nurse! he is cold—so cold. Give me that flannel shawl. I will take him to the fire; I am sure he cannot be well."

Yes, icy cold he was; but nothing less than Promethean heat could restore warmth to that tiny frame, or bring back life into the laughing eyes. He was dead—quite dead; and, as Nina drew back the coverings, there were stains on the white linen which showed it was not the gentle, kindly touch of Nature, but the hand of violence which had been there, and rudely severed the thread of that young existence. What could that guiltless infant have done to provoke such a fate? Who could have had the heart to shed the innocent blood of that sweet child, who, but a few hours before, had been glowing in all the beauty of perfect health?

The nurse broke into loud ejaculations of grief and horror. Then, frightened at Nina's white face, and the fixed, tearless gaze with

which she continued to regard the child, so unlike any tokens of anguish she had ever witnessed, she thought her mistress must be going to die too, and rushed in search of Sir William, Mr. Trevor, any one, so that she might not be alone with that terribly calm agony.

Horror-stricken as Mr. Trevor felt at the nurse's tale, as soon as he entered the room in which Nina was, every other thought was absorbed in anxiety for her. She had taken the child up, and sat with him pressed closely to her breast, giving no more sign of life than the infant in her arms, save that now and then a shudder ran through her frame. For a second Mr. Trevor felt too awe-struck to move. At last he went and, kneeling at her side, put his arms around her, still not speaking, for he felt how powerless any words he could utter would be to give her consolation. She took no notice, except to fix her tearless eyes on his with such a piteous glance, that it rent his very heart to look at her. The speechless intensity of her sorrow alarmed him. Tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, he wrote a hasty line to Janet, and one to their doctor in Draw-

lingham, to summon them at once. These he gave to the nurse, who sat sobbing in a corner of the room, telling her to despatch one of the grooms immediately to fetch both the physician and Miss Trevor. He feared he knew not what, but anything was better than this inaction.

Left alone with Nina, he returned once more to her side, and stood for a long while there. For some time he could not speak; he felt it would be almost like a mockery to preach to her yet of resignation, and so he showed his sympathy merely in silent gestures. At length, seeing she did not rouse herself, he tried gently to take the child from her arms. "My darling," he said, "this only does you harm. It is, I know it must be, terrible to bear, but try, if you can, to forget all but the dear child's present safety and joy. We know that however miserable we may be, he is for ever free from all pain and suffering. Is there no comfort in that thought?"

Although she would not let him take the infant, his words had some effect, for she rose of her own accord, and, with tottering, uncertain footsteps, carried her precious burden to his little cot, where she gently laid him down in

the shawl which she had put around him in the vain hope of restoring warmth ; then, as if first alive to the fact of her loss, she flung herself on the bed close by, and, bursting into a flood of tears, murmured passionately,—“ Oh! God, let me die! I *cannot* live without him. Oh! my boy, my boy!”

Painful as it was to witness her frenzied grief, Mr. Trevor felt less alarmed than by her former unnatural calmness. Sitting at the side of the bed, he smoothed back the hair from her brow with a gentle, loving touch, which was of itself soothing, saying now and then such words of affection and consolation as love would suggest to his mind. She might have been a little child again by the way in which she clung to him, till at last, having sobbed herself into a sort of doze, he laid her head down on the pillow, and telling the nurse, who had just returned, to watch by her mistress, he went to break the sad news as best he could to Sir William.

On the landing he met Mrs. Chester, looking more excited than he had ever seen her before. “ It is not, it cannot be true,” she said, “ what the servants tell me?”

Mr. Trevor's sad face was answer enough.

"Have you any suspicion?" she asked. "The nurse we have known all her life, and she was devoted to the child."

"I cannot believe her in the least degree concerned in it," said Mr. Trevor. "Her grief is too genuine; but I was going in search of Sir William. Can you tell me where he is to be found? I do not like to take any steps for investigating the matter till I have spoken to him."

"He is nowhere downstairs," replied Mrs. Chester. "He must be still in his dressing-room; the door is locked."

"I am afraid there is something wrong," said Mr. Trevor, after they had knocked repeatedly in vain. "Have you any keys that would be likely to unlock it?" After a delay of about five minutes, they succeeded in opening the door, but, on entering the room, they found it tenantless. "At any rate," thought Mr. Trevor, "we have this to be thankful for; it is no case of illness, or worse, as I almost began to fear." With a perplexed look at his companion, he said,— "What can have become of him?"

"He is doubtless gone for an early walk, and has been detained somewhere; but it appears extraordinary that he should have taken the key with him."

"I scarcely think that can be the case," said Mr. Trevor, with a glance at the bath, which had not been used. "If you remember, the hot-water can is still outside the door; and, besides, do you see those candles burning? If it had been light enough for him to go out, he certainly would have extinguished them."

Approaching the dressing-table, Mr. Trevor involuntarily shuddered, for there lay open a case of razors, and one was missing. As he stood looking at them, one horrid idea chasing another through his mind, a movement from Mrs. Chester attracted his attention. Her eyes had been wandering around the room in search of some clue to her brother-in-law's mysterious disappearance. At last she discovered on the mantel-piece a letter, directed in a hand which, though shaky and uncertain, was plainly to be recognized as his.

The envelope was addressed to Lady Chester, but Mr. Trevor did not hesitate to break the seal. Was it any wonder that he

turned pale with horror, and his hand shook as he read the contents, which ran as follows, beginning abruptly, as though in continuation of a train of thought?—

“ ‘*Entail a curse on his innocent offspring, and probably on future generations.*’ Those were his words. Do you suppose when I married you I did not know what I was doing? Has not the same demon who urged me to deceive you been near me ever since, taunting me with my weakness and cowardice, and telling me that vengeance was dogging my footsteps, and would overtake me some day, as it has done to-night? The more I think of it the more sure I feel that your father, and you too, perhaps, were speaking of me. But no one can blame me in the future. I have done all that is possible to blot out the curse. I shall leave no child to be tempted as I have been. Do you think it costs me nothing to turn my back on you, the only one I ever loved? Do you imagine I felt no pain when I looked upon our sleeping child, and felt that mine must be the hand to close his eyes for ever? I could not have done it if the avenger had not been at my side. He laughed,

and told me I was a coward, afraid to undo the mischief I had wrought; and I could have laughed, too, to think how I would disappoint him; but I feared to wake the nurse. The fiend is at my side now. He tells me I dare not complete my work of reparation by leaving you; but I'll prove to him once more that he is wrong. It will be useless to try and trace me. Hours before you read this I shall be far away, and I have taken care you shall have no clue to guide you in any search you may choose to make. For the future I shall be alone with *that thing*, which, since I married you, has never left my side; but he cannot taunt me now with my deception. I have told you all. You will never again behold your guilty husband,

“WILLIAM CHESTER.”

Passing the letter to his companion, Mr. Trevor sank with a groan into the nearest chair. His poor child—his darling Nina! How little he had dreamt of such a fate for her! Her boy, the joy of her heart, cruelly murdered, and by his own father! She must never know this.

Even Mrs. Chester's essentially cold nature was moved ; but the pity she felt for Nina was displayed in her own peculiar fashion. " It is a sad visitation," she said ; " but doubly so for her. I feared all along that something would happen to the little boy, for the fondness with which she regarded him amounted almost to idolatry ; but I never thought of anything like this. It seems, perhaps, a heavy punishment ; but it was doubtless necessary. What do you purpose doing, Mr. Trevor ?"

" I think," said he, " the sooner I get my daughter away from here the better ; and the contents of this letter we must, at least for the present, keep to ourselves. All that it is necessary to say is that Sir William has had to leave home suddenly."

" Truly the dispensations of Providence are wonderful," said Mrs. Chester. " Shall I go and see poor Nina, and talk to her a little ? It would be a painful task, but I shall not shrink from it ; for in her present softened state it might do much good."

Mr. Trevor thanked his companion, but said he feared she was at present too prostrated to derive benefit from even Mrs. Chester's exhor-

tations. He did not add the thought uppermost in his mind, that of all the things likely to drive the poor child to distraction would be the having to listen while Mrs. Chester, with a display of stony sympathy, and her usual assumption of superiority, improved the occasion. He knew too well of what a head-breaking sort would be her precious balms of consolation; and so during the whole day he contrived, on one pretext or another, to keep her away from Nina. Mrs. Chester was not offended, only sorry that Mr. Trevor should be so blind to his daughter's best interests as to deprive her of a companionship and influence so sure to be beneficial.

CHAPTER XXII.

But how should we be glad?
Encompassed with a thousand woes and fears,
How should we not be sad?

R. C. TRENCH.

WE do not wish to enter into any of the painful details of the succeeding days: the coroner's inquest, the charge of murder against some

person or persons unknown, the visits of detectives, and all the trying incidents inseparable from such an investigation. Mr. Trevor allowed the law to take its course. He felt he could do no other; but, undoubtedly, it was a relief to his mind that no one suspected the fact which Sir William's letter had made known to him. The general and popular belief was that the Baronet himself had been murdered and his body made away with by the same hands which had killed his child. Many were the speculations concerning his fate; but everything continued to be shrouded in mystery.

Mr. Trevor did not feel called upon to reveal the truth, and bring dishonour upon the name his daughter bore. To what end could it serve?—for every effort to trace Sir William had failed. Both Charles Chester and his cousin's legal advisers, on being communicated with, decided that not only her own portion, but the whole property, should be left, for the time, at Lady Chester's disposal, as they did not credit the rumour of Sir William's death, and thought he might any day return.

It was only through Mr. Trevor's tact and

judicious management, combined with Janet's good nursing, that Nina was saved from a dangerous illness. They conveyed her as soon as possible from the place whose every association had become horror and pain to her, and the peace and quiet of her childhood's home, together with the never-ceasing care and tender love of those around her, did much to restore some portion of health and spirits.

She never asked anything about her husband nor even mentioned his name; and no one knew whether or not he was connected in her mind with the murder of her child. The bare idea of returning to Rookwood seemed positive agony to her, so it was decided to shut the place up, only retaining enough servants to keep it in order. Her own horse and pony-carriage were brought to the Vicarage, and in time she was induced to take rides with her father; but she still refused to see any one beyond her own family, dreading, naturally enough, the impertinent sympathy and prying civilities of the Nowall and Pickup tribe.

For nearly two months she managed to avoid meeting even their nearest neighbours

at the park; but one day, on returning from the village, she was overtaken by Mrs. Nowall, who, with Lady Twirlwell, was on her way to call at the Vicarage. The latter took Nina's small, wasted hand between her two plump ones, with a look of real sympathy and concern. Her mother did not give her time to say anything, but immediately began,—“My dear Lady Chester, you are looking quite ill and pale; you really should not fret so; you ought to go about a little more. Come up to us now and then; it would be a change for you, too, now our Maria is with us; it is more cheerful than this. The Vicarage, to my mind, is depressing, the situation is so low. Don't you think so, Maria?”

“I don't know, I'm sure, Ma; I never thought so. It is not to be wondered at, you know, that Lady Chester should be dismal. *I* should, I know.”

“To be sure, my dear, to be sure. I forget how short a time it is,” with a glance, taking in the quality of the black silk Nina wore, and to within a nail's breadth the depth of the crape with which it was trimmed. “I recollect when my little Johnny died (that's the reason

I was always so fond of your brother, my dear, because he's got the same name) it well-nigh broke my heart. I wasted till I was a sight to see; and if it had not been for the wine I took every hour, I'm sure I should have gone out of my mind. I hope you take plenty of stimulants, my dear; there's nothing like them for keeping up the constitution."

Nina's sensitiveness regarding anything connected with those last, dark days at Rookwood was so great, that the bare allusion to the fact of any one's going out of one's mind, added to her companion's talk of the child she had lost, quite overcame her. She leant against the post of the gate which they had just reached, so white and trembling that Mrs. Nowall was alarmed. She had not the remotest notion that any remark of hers could have caused it, and fussily tried to make Nina take her arm; but this she refused, begging them to go on to the house, and saying she would be better directly, and would then follow them.

When the two ladies entered the drawing-room, Mr. Hunt and Mr. Trevor, whom they found there, both had the air of people interrupted in a discussion of some importance.

Mrs. Nowall, not in the least deterred by the presence of the former, rushed at once upon the subject uppermost in her mind.

"Oh, Mr. Trevor! I walked up from the village with Lady Chester. She seemed to me to be looking very ill. Poor dear! I'm truly sorry for her; but I think if she could be got to rouse herself a bit, 'twould do her good. I hope you're not vexed, Mr. Trevor. I always speak my mind, you know. Couldn't she go about and visit her friends a little? I don't, of course, mean parties, and all that kind of thing, but just ourselves, and so on,—people she could be comfortable with. I'm pretty sure 'twould do her good."

"I should not like to urge her to anything," replied Mr. Trevor. "I shall be thankful if she ever recovers her former life and animation."

"I think," said Mr. Hunt, "you take the wisest as well as the kindest course. In such a case, time and patience are likely to do more than any forced cheerfulness, or unnatural efforts made to take pleasure in things which, for a while, have lost all attraction."

"But then, Mr. Hunt," said Mrs. Nowall,

“sorrow is the lot of all men ; and, to my way of thinking, the less we give way to it the better (not meaning anything personal, Mr. Trevor).”

“The necessity of evil,” replied Mr. Hunt, with a satire quite unmarked by the person at whom it was levelled, “is a most excellent maxim when applied to the case of others ; but we most of us find it hard to be philosophical where our own feelings are in question. Do you remember,” he continued, turning to Mr. Trevor, “what Adriana says in ‘The Comedy of Errors’ :—

‘A wretched soul, bruised with adversity,
We bid be quiet when we hear it cry ;
But were we burdened with like weight of pain,
As much, or more, we should ourselves complain.’”

“I dare say I read it when I was child,” said Mrs. Nowall. “He was an emperor, or something of that sort, wasn’t he ? But I’ve forgotten all the Roman history I ever learnt, and I find I can get along just as well without it. For my part, I think there’s a precious deal too much fuss made about education now-a-days. As far as I can see, learning never did much yet to pay butcher, baker, or doctor ;

and I know servants were something like servants before there was such a rage for book-learning. *Now*, they think of nothing but fine clothes, and eating and drinking, and novel-reading. By the way, now I think of it, Mr. Trevor, I thought Lady Chester might know of a cook. The wear and tear I have to put up with is beyond everything. This woman can't so much as send up a decent *ongtray*!"

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Trevor," said Lady Twirlwell, "Ma is always in a way when Sir Tim is here. I'm sure she needn't be."

"Well, my dear, and of course I am," said Mrs. Nowall, in an overpoweringly magnificent manner, designed to impress those present with the importance of her daughter's position; "to be sure, I like to have things nice; I know very well the style you keep up at Twickenham."

At this moment Janet entered, greatly to the relief of Mr. Hunt, who for the last five minutes had been smothering a succession of yawns. "Bless me!" ejaculated Mrs. Nowall, "why, Miss Janet, you are looking quite blooming."

"I have just returned from a long walk,"

she replied, "which Elsie and I have been taking, to a distant part of the parish. I hope, Lady Twirlwell, this is not to be such a short visit as your last?"

"Oh, I'm sure you're very kind! I'm afraid, though, we shall have to be getting home again in a day or two. Sir Tim has so many engagements in town, you know, and he won't leave me and baby behind."

"But you must come and see us before she goes, Miss Janet," said the mother. "That won't be till next week, I can tell her, engagements or no engagements. But, dear, dear, how late it is getting! Five o'clock, I declare, and these March days are so short! Come, Maria, my dear, we must be going."

After their departure, Janet went immediately to her sister's room, and there she found her, trying hard to write letters, but looking so wan and tired, that, assuming the authority which she had taken upon her of late, she took away the writing materials, and, settling Nina in a chair by the fire, said,—
"Now, my dear, you are to do as you are told, and be quiet, please. You have been overtiring yourself, of course. Mr. Hunt is

with papa, and, to all appearance, intends to spend the evening here; so I don't mean to let you go down till tea-time; and, as we have a full hour before we need think of beautifying ourselves, if you are a good child, and try to go to sleep, I will read to you."

For some time nothing was heard but the sound of Janet's voice. But, quiet as Nina was, she was evidently not inclined to sleep, nor was her mind following what her sister uttered. "Janet, I can't bear it any longer," she said at last. "It is not, as you suppose, grief for my boy which is wearing me out, for, day by day, I am learning even to be thankful that he is spared the fate which, had he lived, might have been his; but it is this anxiety, this dread, this constant fear lest my husband should return, which is sometimes almost more than I can endure. For, Janet, I must tell you, I never loved him. I did try—I tried with all my might, but I could not. And now, after what has happened, I dare say it is wicked, but I hate the sound of his name. The very thought of him makes my blood run cold. The consciousness that he breathed the same air would, I think, be enough to kill me.

Do you think, dear, I have not known who took my darling's life away? And how could I bear to look upon that man again?"

Janet allowed her sister to talk on, saying now and then a soothing word. She felt sure it would do her good to speak freely, and she was not mistaken. Nina appeared so much brighter during the evening, that Mr. Trevor felt quite re-assured. He had, in spite of his better judgment, been troubled by Mrs. Nowall's remarks. We all know how the speeches of silly people now and then affect the feelings and influence the conduct of even the wise and strong among us; though our reason may tell us ever so emphatically the absurdity of their assertions, yet they have, for a time, a certain hold upon us.

After tea, little Elsie (who, since Johnny had been sent to school, seemed to have established a right to her sisters as playfellows) begged Nina to come into the nursery "for one little quarter of an hour," to help her in dressing a family of dolls, which had been, for a long time, the objects of her tenderest solicitude.

To Janet's dismay, while Nina was still upstairs, Mr. Trevor went into the library to

get a book, leaving her alone with their guest. She had never looked upon Mr. Hunt in any other light than as her father's friend until lately, when it had become impossible to mistake the meaning of his manner towards herself. Feeling that she could never return his regard, this consciousness gave her nothing but pain. She was not one of those girls who play with hearts as though they were croquet-balls, whose delight is to count up the number of their victims, and whose pleasure and excitement in the game increase in proportion to the sufferings they inflict. Not being, we say, of this contemptible class, as soon as she suspected that Mr. Hunt's feelings towards her were stronger than those of friendship, she kept as much as possible out of his way; and, when obliged to meet him, substituted a cold, reserved manner for her former freedom and unrestraint. This change of behaviour had quite a contrary effect from what she intended it to produce, the only result being to make Mr. Hunt more determined than ever to ascertain her real feelings towards him. He had come, therefore, this afternoon, with his mind fully made up, to know the

worst, and, having gained Mr. Trevor's consent, there was nothing left but to speak to Janet herself. And, now the opportunity had arrived, he almost began to wish he could put it off, so nervous and uncomfortable did he feel. He sat turning over the leaves of a book on the table, not in the least knowing whether the volume in question treated of theology, dietetics, fancy-work, or art in general. It must be confessed Janet did nothing to help him out of his embarrassment. She sat without speaking, seeming to be intently occupied with the embroidery in her hand, and, in her heart of hearts, devoutly wishing that either her father or Nina would appear, and put an end to an interview which became more awkward and confusing every moment.

Presently Mr. Hunt put aside the book, and, in his usual abrupt, almost blunt manner, said,—“I wish you would not sit there stitch-stitching in that imperturbable way.”

“I shall be very willing to change my occupation, Mr. Hunt, if you can propose a better, or one that you would find more pleasing.”

“Don't be so cold,” he pleaded. “I have had enough of that lately. If you could only

have known what pain your manner gave me, you surely would not have acted as you have done for the last two months."

Janet made no reply. She really did not know what to answer, without supposing more than he had given her the right to.

After a minute or two, he went on,—“I am not good at circumlocution, as you know, and I love you too well to be able to endure any longer this suspense. Some little time ago, I hoped—I thought—you were learning to care for me a little, but now I scarcely dare to ask if you can return my affection.”

“Oh, Mr. Hunt! Please don’t say any more. I am very sorry, but it is impossible.”

“Why? Why impossible? Janet, dear Janet!” he said, taking her hand, “I have been too hasty, but do not decide at once. I will wait as long as you like.”

“I must not deceive you,” she replied. “It cannot be as you wish. If I were to wait six months or six years my answer would still be the same.” Then, marking the pained look on his face, she said,—“I hope you will not mind much. As a friend, I have always liked you more than almost any one I know.”

"Then why not let me win your love? Unless," here a new fear seized him, "unless you care for some one else; then, indeed, I must resign all hope. But, tell me! it is not so, is it?"

"That is a question we need not enter into," she answered, flushing painfully. "Is it not sufficient for you to know that I can never have any other feeling for you than one of friendship? I cannot tell you how inexpressibly painful all this is to me," she continued; "but I do hope and trust,—indeed, I feel sure,—that you will soon find some one to care for you as you deserve, and one who will be far more worthy of your regard than I am."

"That can never be," he said, shaking his head sadly. "But I see how things are. I will not trouble you any more. I cannot wait to see Mr. Trevor; he will understand how it is. Good-bye, Miss Trevor,"—with a slight tinge of bitterness in his voice. "You have given me a lesson in humility I shall not soon forget. Don't mind me," he added, hastily, seeing tears in her eyes, "you have nothing to reproach yourself with."

"Won't you shake hands?" she said, as he

moved towards the door. "Do let us part friends."

He turned, took her hand, hesitated for a moment, then raised it to his lips, and, before she could say another word, was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

If we know 'tis well that such change should be,
What do we learn from the things we see ?
That an erring and sinning child of dust
Should not wonder and murmur, but hope and trust.

LIFE's stirring incidents, like its sorrows, generally travel in battalions, and we are seldom visited by one without its bringing an heir to succeed it; and really it seemed, to judge from the appearance of things about this time, as if the old, quiet, uneventful life of Nympton Vicarage was never to return again.

A few days after the events recorded in the preceding chapter, a foreign letter was received, addressed to Lady Chester. It came from a certain Jules Faurien, the pastor of a Protestant church in a small village in the south of

France. The following is, as nearly as possible, a translation :—

“ MADAME,

“ I have to convey to you the sad tidings that your husband, the Baronet, Sir William Chester, is no more. When I visited him on his arrival here six weeks ago, he was then so very ill that I would have written to his friends, but he would not suffer it. Only just before his death he gave me your address, and told me I might write and let you know when all was over. The doctors say it was a disease on the brain, and something quite beyond their skill. I stayed with him until the last. He talked much of you, dear Madame, and said many things I could not comprehend, for my understanding of English is not good. But one often-repeated sentence I remember; it was this:—‘Tell her the curse will now be blotted out, and she will again be happy. There is no more left for me to do.’”

Then followed some further particulars, mingled with expressions of sympathy; and lastly, he wrote,—

“ I send with this the certificate which the

law requires. The few things Monsieur brought with him I took into my charge, and have used to defray the expenses since. If there are any more questions you would ask, or aught that I can do for you, dear Madame, my services you may command.

“I remain, in all sympathy and obedience,
Yours,

“JULES FAURIEN.

“Any letters for me should be addressed to the ‘Poste Restante, at Tournon.’”

Nina's feelings on the perusal of this most strange and unexpected epistle were very mixed. Now that she was assured Sir William could never again trouble her by his presence, all his wrong-doing was put aside, and she remembered nothing but the devotion and love which he had lavished upon her in the early days of their acquaintance, while her tender heart was filled with pity as she thought of the misery he must have endured, going away thus and dying in a foreign land amongst strangers. It was sad! and tear after tear dropped upon the paper before her; but even as

she wept, the load which had been pressing on her heart seemed to grow lighter.

Presently, gathering the papers together, Nina took them into her father's study, and laid them on the table before him, then, without saying a word, turned and looked out of the window while he read. The appearance of the garden, with its early spring flowers and budding leaves, carried her mind back forcibly to the time of her short engagement, and, as it seemed to her now, too hasty marriage. Only three years ago!—but what changes since then! Though not quite one-and-twenty, Nina yet seemed to have lived a whole lifetime of sad experiences. Married and a mother, and so soon left childless and a widow. But this last, mournful as the word sounded in her ears, was certainly, under the circumstances, no cause for repining. As she felt her father's hand upon her shoulder, she was conscious that there was much yet left to live for, and, turning, she clung to him with all her old impulsive fondness, and met his anxious, questioning glance with a look from which already much of the cloud lately shadowing her life seemed to have vanished. She was

of too genuine a nature to put on, for a moment, an appearance of dejection she did not feel, or to assume any manner merely because it was supposed to be the proper and correct thing; and, from this time, she brightened visibly hour by hour till her father's heart was gladdened, though he could not in the least understand the workings of her mind, or the causes which had combined to produce such an effect.

Two days later, he said to her,—“Nina, dear, I have heard from your solicitors and from Mr. Chester, to whom I wrote the day before yesterday, and I find you will have to sign certain documents, which, of course, could be sent, but Mr. Harrison says it would be much more satisfactory if he could have a personal interview with you, either here or in town. If you feel up to it, I think I could manage to get away for a week, and would go to London with you.”

A week ago Nina would have shrunk from the idea of leaving her home as the most painful that could be suggested to her; and there could not be a stronger proof of the change that had come over her feelings than the way in which

she immediately acceded to her father's proposal, offering to start, if he liked, that very morning.

The matter being thus decided, two days later they were to be found at a quiet hotel about five minutes' walk from Hyde Park. Sir William's house in Sloane Street was shut up; but even if such had not been the case, Mr. Trevor would have hesitated to take Nina there, as it had been dawning upon him lately that her married life could not have been so happy as she would have led him to suppose, and that the fewer associations connected with that time the better for her returning peace of mind.

"Do you know that Lady Peyton is in town?" said Mr. Trevor, as they sat at dinner on the night of their arrival.

"I supposed she would be," Nina replied. "They are usually up for a short time after Easter; but I hope she will not find us out, papa, and call. I know she would want me to stay there, and I could not now."

Truth to say, Nina was influenced by the thought of Augusta's engagement, and the thought of whom she would be likely to meet

there, more than by anything else. She had not seen him^{now} for more than two years; and now he was the promised husband of another, she felt it would be better they should never meet.

Without having an idea in what direction her thoughts were flowing, Mr. Trevor's own mind seemed to be going with them, for he said,—“ Oh! by-the-bye, I found a note from Mr. Chester awaiting me here, saying that he should try to call some time this evening. It will be a surprise to him to find you here, for I forgot to mention in my hurried note that you would accompany me.”

Shortly after, Nina surprised her father by declaring she would go to bed.

“ My dear child! ” he exclaimed, “ do you know it is only eight o'clock? Of course, if you are fatigued I will^{not} keep you up; but it is very early.”

If Nina meant by this means to escape their expected visitor, she was too late, for, as she spoke, a knock was heard at the door, and Charley entered. She felt sure who it was, though she dared not look up. He started at the sight of that slight figure bending over

the couch gathering together papers, magazines, and sundry odds and ends, which had been thrown down on their arrival two hours ago. He knew directly who it was; only one person in the world could own that small head, with its thick braids of sunny hair. He was so taken by surprise, that he could scarcely recover himself sufficiently to respond to Mr. Trevor's greetings.

Nina shook hands, but could not trust herself to speak. She kept her face turned from the light, while her heart beat so violently, that it shook the very chair on which she sat.

Mr. Trevor talked on for some time upon general topics, as if the minds of all three were not filled with subjects of far greater importance to them than French elections, Bismarck's policy, or education in Scotland. He inquired presently for Lord and Lady Peyton, and more particularly for their daughter, Miss Elton. But even this subject, to Mr. Trevor's surprise, seemed to possess no special interest for Charley. His manner was so *distract* and pre-occupied, that Mr. Trevor, thinking he must be tired, proposed to go at once in search of some deeds that were to be transferred to Mr., now

Sir Charles, Chester, and which he had brought with him in his portmanteau.

For some minutes after they were left alone, Charley sat watching Nina's drooping figure and half-averted head; and as he noted the small, delicate-looking, blue-veined hands, and the soft cheek, from which the flush raised by his entrance had quite departed, leaving in its place a marble-like paleness, very different from her former bright, ever-varying colour, his eyes moistened at the thought of what heavy clouds must have darkened that young life to have brought about such a change. All the old love rushed back to his heart with overwhelming force. He longed to take her in his arms, to protect and shelter her in the future from every care and trouble, and by his love and devotion to restore once more her former health and happiness. But, alas! he was bound to that frigid specimen of womanhood, Augusta Elton, and in honour he must fulfil his engagement. He had, until now, been deluding himself with the idea that he really cared for his *fiancée*, and that in marrying her he would, by force, drive Nina's image from his heart. But now he felt how vain was that

hope. He kept watching his companion's figure, till at last the desire that she should take some notice of him grew unbearable. At length he went, and, bending over her chair, said,—“ My dearest Nina,—don't be angry with me for saying that, for at least I am your cousin,—I have thought about you so much, I am afraid to tell you how much, for I know I displeased you when I was at Rookwood two years ago.”

“ No,” she said, raising her earnest eyes to his, “ it was not that; but, but—I scarcely know how to say it.”

“ Tell me, dear,” he said, bending down till his cheek almost touched hers.

“ The thought that you misunderstood me,” she said, very low, “ has made me unhappy ever since. I was not angry, I only dared not trust my own heart.”

“ Dear,” he murmured, “ you are too good for me. I might have known it was your nobleness and goodness, and not coldness. I was wrong to be angry.”

“ After all,” she answered, “ perhaps it has been best for both of us.”

“ I don't know,” he said, “ breaking impetuously from her side, and striding impatiently

up and down the room ; “ I don’t know what your experience may have been, but my life, although the world might call it a successful one, is anything but a happy one. Do you think all along I have not found one voice wanting amidst the thousands to which I was compelled to listen ? Again and again I have watched you from a distance, when you have been unconscious of my presence, and, perhaps, talking to other men, and smiling, till I have grown almost wild with jealousy, that I, who of all men would most value your society, should be the only one to be deprived of it. Oh, heavens ! how I longed for one word or look, to hold your hand but for one moment in mine ! Still I held back, fearing to make you despise me, as I thought, more than ever. And now, to have such happiness within my reach, and not to be able to grasp it, it is more than I can bear.” He sat down and covered his face with his hands.

“ Do not grieve so, Charley, dear Charley ; I am not worth it,” she said, going to him, and laying one hand timidly on his shoulder, while her voice trembled with emotion. “ It does seem very hard, but—but we surely shall have help to do right.”

"I shall never be without a good angel while I keep your memory fresh in my heart, as I shall do for ever," he said, taking her disengaged hand between his.

"It cannot be wrong to remember, but we must be content with that; you will be very near us soon. I hope you will not come to Nympton,—I could not bear it."

"That is about the hardest thing you could require of me," he answered; "but I will do anything you wish. Perhaps something may yet happen."

"It will not do, dear, to think of that; but I do hope you understand me now, and will not think me hard and cold again. There is papa's step; I must go." Stooping suddenly, and putting her lips to his forehead, she drew away the hand which he held, and passed her father with a hurried good-night in the door-way. She would not wait for either of them to see the fast-gathering tears she could no longer restrain.

CHAPTER XXIV.

POL. My honourable lord, I will most humbly take my leave of you ;

HAM. You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal.

Hamlet, Act ii.

“COULD you not put a little more feeling into that passage, Augusta ?” It was Sir Charles Chester who spoke, in the midst of trying for about the hundredth time to play some of his favourite violin music with her. He had thought over and over again that he must give up the effort in despair ; for although Augusta was a good pianist so far as execution and correct playing went, she yet lacked the one thing without which the most finished performance was to him, not only unpleasing, but positively painful, that is to say, her playing, like her character, though true and faultless, was yet utterly cold and unsympathetic.

“Do try it once more,” he said. “The harmonies are so perfect, where you come in with the air, and, as it were, take up and answer what I have been saying before. I want you

to give it a little effect—to breathe it out, as it were.”

“You will, I am afraid, be disappointed,” she answered, quite good-temperedly. “You know it is not my habit to play for effect; but I will try it again, if you like.”

“There, stop,” he said; “in that bar—look, I want you to follow me, and play it a little slower.”

“I did not see any *rallentando* marked, or I would have observed it,” she replied.

A word not very fit for polite ears rose to Charley’s lips, but he checked it in time, rather shocked at his own hastiness. Augusta’s calm, passionless character, displayed in all her actions, small as well as great, he had found more than ever provoking of late. “If I could see her only once excited about anything, or even in a rage,” he said to himself, “I think I should like her better.” But, no, she was far too placidly well-bred ever to be either irritable or enthusiastic. It would have been as reasonable to expect a match to ignite on a block of ice as to think of striking a spark of fire out of her upon any subject whatever. If one had searched the whole

world over, it would have been impossible to find two people more utterly dissimilar than were Charley and his future wife. The greatest wonder was how they ever became engaged at all, except that his heart was, as it were, taken at the rebound. There is no mistake more frequent, and none so fatal to real happiness, as that which is made by people whom unkindly fortune has separated from one they fondly loved. They try to transfer their affections, hoping by this means to console themselves and fill up the void in their hearts. But it will not do; and oftentimes they find out, only when it is too late, that although their arms may have received another, their heart is as desolate, nay, more desolate than ever. "Love has no wherefore," as the Latin poet truly says. It is such an unreasoning, unphilosophical thing, that while in one case the very effort to root it out makes it cling all the closer, in another, where, perhaps, such a feeling may be a positive duty, the more we try to encourage it the further off it seems.

Like many undemonstrative people, Augusta had much penetration, and she was beginning to discover that the state of things between her

and her lover was not satisfactory. Being both high-minded and generous, she was quite ready to take to herself more than her fair share of blame. On the present occasion she saw he was again annoyed with her, but why she scarcely knew.

"Perhaps we had better give it up for the time," she said.

"Yes, I think it is as well," he replied. "I will put all my music together, and send Henry for it by-and-bye. It is the last opportunity we shall have of trying anything together for a long time. I am afraid I am a horribly impatient fellow. I hope you will not have a very unpleasant impression of me left on your mind."

"I forgot you were going to Rookwood to-morrow," said Augusta. "But cannot you come here this evening?"

"I am afraid not," he replied. "There is an important debate to-night, and I shall be in the House until late. I must make this good-bye."

"Charley, I want to say something before you go. I have thought for a long time of speaking, but have put it off day after day. I

think our engagement is altogether a mistake, and it is best that we should put an end to it."

"Why?" he said. "What makes you think that?"

"I will tell you," she answered, speaking calmly, though internally she was greatly agitated. "For such a contract to be binding, it is necessary that the regard should be mutual, and I have become convinced lately that you do not care for me."

If he had really loved her, nothing could have been easier for him than by caresses and loving words to have dispelled her doubts; but he felt conscience-stricken, and only answered, humbly, and looking very like a naughty boy,—"I am afraid I have not always behaved as I should to you."

"I am not blaming you," she answered. "I only ask if you can honestly say that you love me?" She waited a few minutes, but as he continued silent, she said, at last,—"*It is enough; I give you your release. From this time we meet as strangers only. Do not say any more, Sir Charles,*" as he was about to speak. "*It has been a pleasant dream to me, but I am not sorry to have awoke.*"

“Do you think I am going to be dismissed in that summary way?” he asked. “I quite allow that our engagement *has* been a mistake, and I don’t wonder at your having got tired of me; but when we meet in the future, there is no reason to prevent its being as friends. My respect for you is such that it would really pain me if I thought I had fallen so low in your estimation as to be from this time ranked among mere acquaintances.”

“I never intended to convey that impression to your mind,” she answered, turning away to hide the feeling she was too proud to show. “But there is no object in prolonging this interview. I will tell my parents all that is necessary they should know, viz., that we have parted by mutual consent, and no one will have a right to blame either of us.” So saying, she held out her hand in farewell.

Although Charley’s regard for her was of the most Platonic description, it did not suit his affectionate nature to part in this off-hand manner. He would, if he dared, at least have kissed the proffered hand; but this was not to be ventured on under the new relations which subsisted between them; and Augusta stood at

arm's length, looking so like a piece of vivified ice, that the very atmosphere which surrounded her seemed chilled, and any attempt at other than the most formal leave-taking was out of the question.

As he rode through the park some five minutes later his mind was so pre-occupied, that he seemed unusually indifferent to the bright glances showered upon him, and many a fair friend was annoyed at the abstracted air with which he returned their salutations, for his popularity had not one whit diminished since his engagement and accession to his cousin's title and property.

The more he thought over his late interview with Augusta, the more thankful he felt for the course events had taken. He was sure he need not trouble about her feelings, they were never likely to be a burden to her. What we are anxious to believe, we readily credit, and on this point he quite set his mind at ease. "By Jove!" he said, "she parted from me with about as great a show of emotion as she would have displayed at the loss of her card-case."

His vanity was touched, and the strong desire he had expressed but a short time before

to possess her friendship, sank to a very infinitesimal wish indeed. It is impossible to over-estimate this same vanity of ours; if we have been inclined to like any one, ever so greatly, let it just be whispered in our ear that that same person does not think much of us, we immediately find out that they are not nearly so charming as we had imagined, and their good opinion is not, after all, worth having. On the other hand, among our acquaintances there may be an individual whom we know to be both weak-minded and ignorant, we think them, in fact, quite beneath our notice. Wait a little; somebody tells us that this same creature whom we have been despising has an immense admiration for us. How all our ideas change! we discover at once hidden merits in our stupid friend; he, at least, has powers of discrimination, and is some judge of character. We all love our neighbours more for the virtues they find in us than for any we may discover in them; whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, it is the case.

CHAPTER XXV.

I felt that e'en her frown must be
More fair than others' smiles.

Adapted from H. COLERIDGE.

"I THINK it was very shabby of you, papa, not to be present at the launching of Johnny's new boat," said Nina to her father, one July morning, as she had just returned from the beach. "Norman has evidently put his best workmanship about her, and he says 'she's as safe as a tub, although her shape's so elegacious.' So, papa, you see Janet and I will be able to go out by ourselves before the boys return. How pleasant it will be to have them at home again! I do hope Herbert will get leave to stay over Christmas. I am sure he ought after four years' absence. Won't the boat be a surprise for them? I hope they will like it."

"Whatever are their sentiments regarding the boat," said Mr. Trevor, "they ought to be very grateful for such a good sister."

"I don't think after all, papa, I have displayed any great amount of generosity. I shall get quite as much enjoyment out of it as they will."

"There will not be much to complain of certainly, dear, if you derive as much benefit from future excursions as you have already done from the interest and excitement of watching her built. I hope those roses are a good sign," Mr. Trevor said, smoothing her cheek. "Where did you manage to get them, puss? It is a long time since you have favoured us with any so bright."

"I suppose I picked them up in the sea, papa. A queer place, is it not, for such things to grow? Janet and I induced old Norman to pull us out, just to see how the boat felt, and the water looked so tempting in the sunshine, that we made him take us in to Whitesand Cove. We then went to old Nanny's cottage, hunted up our bathing-dresses, and had a most glorious swim, after which we walked home over the cliffs. I wish you had been with us; old Norman was really as good as a play, and he was richer than usual this morning. The way in which he talked of his 'old woman' and her 'grinchites,' and how they tried giving her all sorts of 'doctor's stuff,' 'but nothing wouldn't do her no good,' he said, till he 'took to dosing her by nights with treacle-

podget, and after that it wasn't long before she was on her legs again, and as lively as a cricket.' Imagine old Betty, with the burden of sixty years upon her shoulders, becoming frisky ! I then asked him about his daughter Sarah,—the strong-minded one, you know, papa. I wanted to hear how things were between her and her devoted admirer, John Gatherwool. The old man shook his head, and said,—' The girl isn't to be managed nohow ; I can't do nothing with her, miss, mam—I ax your pardon, my lady, I mean ; for when I speaks to her, all she do say is,—' Why, father do'e think I've got no eyes. Why, I wouldn't marry he if he was the only man in the world. He's as dull as a beetle, and haven't got no spring in his 'eels.'"

" Poor young man !" said Mr. Trevor ; " his wooing certainly does not seem to prosper. That is not a bad description of him either. He is about the slowest specimen of humanity one could well meet."

" Papa," said Janet, who had just entered, looking the picture of trim neatness, " you are encouraging that lazy girl in very bad habits. She has been in the house half-an-hour, and is still sitting with her things on."

"Miss Trevor very often forgets the respect due to her elder sister. Don't you think so, papa? I have to remind you once more, my dear, that I have twelve months the advantage of you in point of age, and in soberness and profundity you cannot approach me by at least twenty years. Nevertheless, when clouds are seen, sensible people seek shelter, so I retreat immediately before the ominous appearance of your countenance."

"I think, if the truth were known," said Mr. Trevor, as soon as Nina was out of hearing, "it was fatigue which kept her sitting so long. You must have had a long walk."

"Not very; it is barely two miles from the Cove; but I am afraid Nina is not strong, though I dare not say so to her, for she cannot bear to be considered weak or delicate. I must, if I can, keep her quiet this afternoon, for Archdeacon Soaper would be grievously disappointed if you went to dine there without her to-night. She was always such a pet of his."

Logicians wisely tell us that "the whole is greater than the part." We have heard that ages ago Hesiod undertook to prove the falsity

of this assertion; but, never having read 'The Works and Days,' or any other production of his pen, we cannot well be accused of plagiarism if we say that, in our opinion also, logic is here, as elsewhere, at fault. Looking at the question on all sides, would not many of our so-called pleasures, if we could have but half of them, be far more delightful? "Oh, that the time of our supposed enjoyment might expire a little sooner!" would, if thoughts could have been put into words, have been the exclamation of more than one guest honoured by an invitation to the Archidiaconal dinner-parties. You always seemed to meet the same people, do the same things, partake of the same dishes—in fact, every thing, even to the conversation, was of a description so heavy, as to have the same effect on the mental digestion that an ill-made plum-pudding would on the physical.

So Nina, in accompanying her father, knew pretty well what to expect: the *crème de la crème* of clerical society, most probably the Dean, possibly the Bishop, with Mrs. Gynarchy, and one or two of the elder episcopal olive-branches; a sprinkling of old-fashioned county people, and two or three retired officers, perhaps,

by way of lighter element. Knowing what was coming, Nina took in a large stock of patience before starting. "I wish you were going with us," she said, as Janet, having driven the maid away, was putting the finishing-touches to her sister's dress; "it would made it a little more bearable."

"You will have papa," answered Janet.

"Yes; but I don't see much of him, the gentlemen sit such a time over their wine, and the conversation in the drawing-room is never very brilliant. Well-bred platitudes are, you will allow, not very enlivening; and I know all the engravings in the books of the poets and the photographs of foreign churches by heart."

"What makes you so cynical to-night?" said Janet. "Just look in the glass, and see if that will not put you in a better humour, not only with yourself but also with the world in general. Those white camellias are perfect."

"Thank you dear," said Nina, kissing her; "no one ever puts in flowers as you do."

"It is not only the flowers I want to have admired. Allow me to inform you, Lady Chester, that you never looked so well in

your life as you do to-night. The old Archdeacon will be more enslaved than ever."

Janet certainly did not exaggerate. There was something almost dazzling in Nina's beauty. Her perfect figure was clad in a rich black velvet, which seemed almost to have grown upon her, so faultlessly did it fit, and, by the contrast of its sombre colour, to enhance the delicate fairness of her complexion; while on her face, which trouble had deprived of none of its youthful, almost childish contour, there glowed the lovely hectic flush, about which her father often felt so anxious. For a moment she seemed pleased at her sister's praise, and glanced at the mirror with a smile; but then a shade of pain crossed her face, and, turning suddenly away, she said,—“What does it matter?” . Noting Janet's look of disappointment, she added,—“Do forgive me, dear; I am dreadfully cross and ungrateful after all the trouble you have taken to make me look nice; but I was thinking—”

“What were you thinking?”

“What I must not tell you now, dear. When we are both old women of seventy, if we live

so long, and you still care for my confidence, perhaps you shall have it."

"Very well, I will remember. But there is your carriage," said Janet. "Good-bye," as she wrapped a cloudy white shawl about her sister's shoulders. "Take care of yourself, and don't perish of *ennui*. I see you think such a fate possible."

They were rather late in arriving, and Nina did not notice particularly all the guests who were present; but suddenly, in the midst of dinner, she heard, at the other end of the table, a voice which sent the blood rushing back to her heart, till her neighbour, thinking she must be going to faint, poured out quickly a glass of water, which he handed to her. She thanked him, and murmured something about the heat, while the whole time, through the buzz of other voices, she could hear the one whose clear tones she would have distinguished among a thousand, such an echo did they wake in her heart.

"I plead guilty to the charge, Mr. Dean," it said; "but I really mean to turn over a new leaf, and spend more of my time in the county. The reason for my having been so much in

Devonshire; was because I felt it a sort of duty to keep my constituents in a good temper."

"I expect we shall have you standing for Drawlingham next time there is a vacancy, Sir Charles," said their hostess.

"I do not think that is likely, Mrs. Soaper; this venerable city and I are at one upon so few points. Drawlingham has an objection to being roused, while I am just as unwilling to have any ideas which I may have adopted sent to sleep. As long as we keep at a respectful distance from one another, we get on very well; but if I were to attempt to establish closer relations the result would be anything but satisfactory." Then, remembering the old-fashioned prejudices of most of those present, he added, "Don't be horrified, and consider me a strong party-man, that I shall never be. Unlike some of my colleagues in office, I am not blind to the faults on our own side, and I think people get, as a rule, far too excited over politics. Pope defined party as 'the madness of the many for the gain of the few,' and I am sure he was not far wrong."

Soon the conversation drifted to other topics; but everything on which they touched

seemed deprived of its usual heaviness, by the young baronet's original remarks and the brilliancy of most of his ideas. He was totally unconscious of Nina's presence, or he would scarcely have been so much at his ease. They were seated on the same side of the table, and far away from each other, and it was not until the ladies left the dining-room that, in passing the chair where he stood, Nina involuntarily looked up, and their eyes met. That glance sent a thrill through him, and, regardless of any presence save hers, he would have sprung forward and seized her hand, but she passed merely a cold bow. With so many eyes upon them, how could she do otherwise?

Nina was thankful for the quiet hour whose dulness she had dreaded. She joined little in the conversation of the other ladies, and appeared to be absorbed in a book of engravings, while all the time she was screwing up her self-control so as to be able to assume a proper degree of indifference. The very effort to restrain the intensity of her feelings rendered her manner so stiff and reserved, that, in spite of his resolve not to be chilled, when Charley, on entering the dining-room, came at once to a

chair at her side, he could scarcely tell what to believe. "Was this proud, cold beauty the Nina he had parted from in London but fifteen months ago?" Still less did she resemble the warm-hearted, mischievous, impulsive girl she had been when he first knew her. "Could it be possible that she was so changed? Or might not this chilly manner be put on to keep him at a distance, and tell him that she had quite outgrown any weakness which she had been foolish enough in former days to acknowledge, and was now ashamed of?"

The programme for the evening would not have been complete without the stereotyped music; so one after another the unhappy victims were trotted out—we beg their pardon, they were asked if they "*would* be so good as to play that lovely piece which had been so much talked about; Lady Cacophon is so musical, and is longing to hear it," the said dowager, like most of the company, only wanting a shelter behind which she might converse freely.

Nina knew too well what was coming when she saw Mrs. Soaper approaching with her blandest smile. "Dear Lady Chester, we are

all impatient to hear your voice. Will you not favour us with a song?"

"I hope you will not think very badly of me," replied Nina, "if I ask you to excuse me this evening. I promise to do double duty next time we meet, provided you are still kind enough to wish it."

But Mrs. Soaper would take no refusal, and, at last, with an expression of countenance which Charley knew meant that she was doing what was very distasteful to her, Nina prepared to comply, when he rose suddenly, and, addressing the lady of the house, said,—“I see Lady Chester does not feel up to singing to-night. I know what it is to be in that sort of mood. I shall make but a poor substitute, but if you will allow me to sing instead I will do my best.”

Mrs. Soaper was delighted; she rose instantly at this bait. His musical powers were well known, though it was rarely he could be induced to give any proof of them, and it was a thing unheard of for him to volunteer. Of course Nina knew this, and felt proportionably grateful. He chose that song of Reichardt's, “Du bist mir nah, und doch so fern”; he

knew so well how to give the tender words their full expression, and with such power did each tone of his voice thrill through her, that, though outwardly calm, her feelings were almost too much for her, and, in her efforts to repress them, she clasped her hands underneath the table till the small gloves were split in all directions.

When he left the piano he came back to his old place, thinking that he should at least get a word of thanks for having come so generously to her rescue. But, no; Nina felt so near to breaking down, that she could not trust herself to look at or speak to him. She turned away, and began to talk to a gentleman standing at her side, who had been for some time trying in vain to engage her attention.

This was too much for Charley,—he could endure it no longer. Going up to Mr. Trevor, he said,—“I must speak to you alone. Come into the conservatory with me.” Mr. Trevor, wondering, complied. “Perhaps you will be kinder than your daughter, and will vouchsafe me a word,” he said, when they were alone. “I want you to be a friend to me, Mr. Trevor; I need one badly enough, Heaven knows,”

with a glance at Nina's figure, which was just visible through the curtained doorway.

"If I can do anything for you, Sir Charles, I shall be very glad; but I must acknowledge this sudden desire for friendship seems to me somewhat strange after the manner in which you have avoided my society for so long. I know your visits to Rookwood have not been frequent, but surely you might now and then have found your way to the Vicarage, knowing how certain of a welcome you were."

"I am sure when you know my motives, Mr. Trevor, you will forgive me. I was under a promise to Lady Chester—to Nina—that I would keep away. Now, thank God! my engagement is at an end, and I am free to tell you all. You will not mistake me as others might, you are yourself too good and honourable; still less would it be possible for you to think Nina anything but what she is. From the first moment in which we met I have loved her as I think woman was never loved before."

"I see it all now," said Mr. Trevor, "and understand much that to me hitherto has been

incomprehensible. Poor child! what a struggle she must have had!"

"I know once, if she might, she would have cared for me," continued Charley. "But do you think she has not changed? Her manner seems so cold and indifferent."

"You forget she still imagines you bound to another. I do not think you need be afraid."

"Could I speak to her? Might I ask her now? Would she come here for a moment, do you think?" said Charley, with his usual headlong impulsiveness.

"It would have rather an odd appearance," said Mr. Trevor, not able to restrain a smile in spite of his sympathy for the young man's evident agitation.

"I meant in any case to have gone to Nympton to-morrow," Charley continued. "I have only been at home a day, and I found this invitation awaiting my arrival. What made me accept it I hardly know, but now I have seen her I cannot wait."

"It is very trying for you, I must acknowledge," replied Mr. Trevor, remembering his own early attachment. And then he thought "it is as bad, perhaps worse, for Nina than

for him." "My dear fellow," he said, laying his hand affectionately on Charley's shoulder, "I can most thoroughly enter into your feelings; but you must see that, your engagement with Miss Elton having so lately come to an end, it would not do to let the world guess the state of things."

"I am far more likely to do that if you keep me away from her," answered Charley.

"I am not going to be so cruel to either of you," replied Mr. Trevor. "I have an idea in my head. I see people are beginning to move; we must not stay here any longer; but mind you follow up whatever hint I give you, and perhaps things may, after all, be as you wish."

Shortly after, Nina heard her father say,—
"I hope you are not on horseback, Sir Charles; the rain is coming down in torrents."

"I am indeed," was the reply. "I had some business in Drawlingham, so I rode over this morning, and dressed at 'The Globe.'"

To Nina's consternation, Mr. Trevor replied,—
"You had better come back, and sleep at the Vicarage, and let your groom bring on the horses to-morrow. I am sure my daughter will be very happy to give you a seat in the

carriage ; it will be better than sleeping at the inn."

Nina wished she could have felt a little more sorry, but she determined that, whatever might be in her heart, in no look or action of hers should there be treason towards Augusta.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Oh, let thy weary heart

Lean upon mine ! And it shall faint no more,
Nor thirst, nor hunger, but be comforted,
And filled with my affection.

The Spanish Student.

As they drove out of the city, Nina was so silent, that if it had not been for the gleam which at intervals shot across her face from the lamps they passed, her companions might have thought she slept. After having driven about a mile, Mr. Trevor put his head out of the window, and said,—“It is not raining nearly so fast now. I think I shall go on the box and have a cigar.”

“Oh, papa !” exclaimed Nina ; but, for once,

he was deaf to her voice. The carriage was stopped, and he had got out before she could say a word more.

Charley felt more at his ease now that he could no longer see the proud, cold look which had so extinguished him an hour before. "Oh, Nina, you *are* changed!" he exclaimed. "I once thought you cared for me a little. I thought, then, that if nothing came between us, if I could honourably and honestly ask you to be mine, and mine only, for ever, you would have been willing to give me the single thing in this world for which I care to live."

"How cruel you are," she said, "to torment me in this way. How can you?" And all her self-control breaking down, she buried her face in the cushions of the carriage, fighting with all the power of her pride against the sobs which nearly choked her.

"Cruel! and to you, my darling. How could I be? Don't you know that I am free now,—free to love whom I will? And where should I turn but to you, knowing that there is not one woman in the wide world so fair and good, and worthy of my soul's deepest reverence and devotion?"

“ Oh, Charley ! Am I dreaming ? It is not, it cannot be true.”

He managed, without the help of words, to convince her that she was not asleep. His kisses were too real for that ; and, as he wound his arms about her, and her head nestled this time, not into the cushions, to both the bliss of this short half-hour's drive seemed to more than compensate for all the anxieties and sorrows of the past. We hope there is not one of our readers who does not know something of that silence which is more eloquent than speech, and who will be able to fill up what passed much better than we can tell them. Mr. G. P. R. James is quite right : there are many situations in life that “ can better be imagined than described,” where the weakest fancy has more power than the most fluent pen ; so, at the risk of being classed among those authors who, when hard up, always “ draw a veil over what follows,” we ask our readers, for once, to supply from the coinage of their own heart and brain all that we fail to express.

It was like dropping from Elysium into every-day life, from poetry to prose, when

the carriage stopped, and Mr. Trevor, opening the door, said,—“We have been a long time getting home; the horses seem tired, and it is such a dark night.”

To tell the truth, neither Nina nor Charley had been aware of these facts.

As soon as they got into the drawing-room, Mr. Trevor, putting his hands on Nina's shoulders, turned her face towards the light. Satisfied at the half-shy, half-bright glance that met his, he said, in a voice which was intended to be low, but which was quite loud enough for Charley to hear,—“Are you still angry with me and my cigar, dear? You know you *were* very indignant.”

The answer was really a whisper, inaudible to any save the one into whose ear it was breathed. “God bless you, dear; I am sure you deserve it,” said Mr. Trevor, embracing her tenderly.

Charley, meanwhile, stood by, indignant with himself for his selfishness, but not liking very well that even her father should touch her, he did so yearn for the exclusive possession of this long-coveted and but lately-won treasure. At this instant she turned towards him with

a look which should have satisfied the most exacting. It said, as plainly as eyes could speak, — "You know you have my soul's deepest love ; but I cannot bear that he should think he has lost me, or that I could for a moment forget him in my own great happiness."

"You had better not stay any longer, my dear," said Mr. Trevor. "I am sure you must be tired."

"I am not a bit, papa. I could sit up all night if it were necessary."

"I have no doubt of it ; but how much would there be left of you in the morning ? Good-night, dear. Jane is not gone to bed, and I think you may trust her and me to look after the comfort of our guest."

Not liking to say any more, Nina began to collect her wraps.

"I may as well put this rug in the hall," she said. "I don't know what made me bring it in here."

"Let me carry it for you," said Charley, of course ; and Mr. Trevor had tact enough not to follow. No selfish feelings mingled with his sympathy, or prevented his fully entering into,

and rejoicing at, the happiness which was plainly visible in Nina's every look and gesture.

Five minutes later, Nina, seeing a light still burning in her sister's room, thought she would go in, on the chance of finding her up. Janet was still brushing her hair.

"That's right," she said, "I waited for you; I thought you might, perhaps, come and have a chat. But what has happened?" as Nina, sitting on the floor, buried her face in her sister's lap, saying,—“Oh, it is too much almost to express. Janet, dear, it has been the happiest evening in all my life. Do you remember the promise I made before I started? I need no longer now have a secret from you.” Then, in broken words, she told her sister much of what has been already recorded in these pages.

When she at length stopped, Janet did not speak, but kept her head turned away. Nina could not understand it.

"Have you nothing to say to me, dear? Are you vexed? Do you think I have done wrong?"

"Oh, no," Janet replied, still with averted head.

But Nina was too brimful of happiness to be chilled by anything.

"Won't you wish me joy?" she said, screwing herself round so as to get a view of her sister's face. To her surprise, Janet's eyes were full of tears.

"My dear, what is it?"

"I do wish you every happiness and blessing, and I am not vexed or shocked at anything you have told me. I don't know what is the matter. But kiss me, and say good-night now, dear; I won't be so foolish to-morrow."

Long after Nina got to her room she pondered over Janet's strange demeanour, to which she could find no clue; but, in spite of her warm love for her sister, and the concern she felt at her evident trouble, her thoughts at last drifted into brighter channels, and when she went to sleep, it was like a happy child, with a smile hovering around her lips.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Is there not rest for one whose best affection
Is deeply shared by him on whom bestowed ?
In strife and turmoil lies the world around,
But here, oh ! surely here may rest be found.

THREE months later, as Nina was busily engaged one morning in tying up the branches of a Gloire-de-Dijon which had been somewhat roughly used by the October winds, a horse's step was heard coming up the drive. She turned round with an expectant look, a bright flush mantling in her cheeks, her heart fluttering, and the light of love beaming in her eyes. Instinct told her who it was. Directly the rider caught sight of her he dismounted, and, throwing the bridle over his arm, seized both her hands.

"I am alone," he said, as she glanced behind him, expecting every moment to see the groom appear. "I would not let Henry come, for I thought, as it was such lovely weather, I might induce you to go out with me. It is such a long time since we have had a ride together."

"Come in now," she said, "and we will talk about it. If you tie 'Prince' to that rail, I will send some one round to fetch him. Do sit down and rest," as they entered the drawing-room. Then, turning to the table, she took up a piece of work, half-mischievously, knowing he could not bear her to do anything when he was present.

"I am not going to allow that, at any rate," he said, laying his hand on hers. "There is one thing you want to learn, my dear, that is, how to do nothing. It is, on some occasions, the most useful accomplishment. But do you know you have not given me one greeting since I arrived?"

"Oh! I thought I was to study the *dolce far niente*, which you consider the highest pitch of excellence that can be arrived at," replied Nina, with grave voice, meekly folded hands, and altogether helpless attitude, but with a light in her eyes which belied her indifferent words.

"There! Remember that is the punishment you will always get when you choose wilfully to misunderstand me."

"I may safely promise I never will again,"

she replied; "the chastisement is too severe. But it is a shame," she added, throwing off her defiant attitude. "I don't know what makes me behave so badly to you, except because I love you so much. Oh, Charley! I think sometimes that you have made me too happy,—that it is too good for this world, and cannot last."

"My darling, why should it not? We must not expect, perhaps, that our horizon will always be cloudless and bright as it is now. But what does it matter? For my part, I think this world could give me no trouble I should care much for so long as I have you by my side. And don't think, dearest, I really mind anything you do or say. As I have told you often, if you were to frown in earnest, your very anger would be dearer to me than the smiles of any other I have ever known. But is it too far for you to ride to Rookwood? I so much want to consult you about that landscape garden. I hope it will be quite done by the time we return to England."

"How delicious it will be," said Nina, "to re-visit Rolandseck, and all those lovely spots on the Rhine, and to contrast the present with

the past! But I must not loiter any longer. I will go and put on my habit, and, if I can, induce papa to accompany us. Don't think me like the poor cat in the adage—I am not in the least afraid of what the world would say to my going with you alone; but I think the ride will do him good, and besides, then, you see, I shall have some one to return with."

There could not be a merrier party than were these three. As they cantered over the common, the sea-breeze was so exhilarating, that even the horses seemed to be unusually excited. Nina insisted upon racing her horse against "Prince"; and, whether from superiority of steed or because she was allowed to do it, "Selim" always got the best of it. She was a fearless rider, and looked so well mounted, that, if such a thing were possible, Charley felt more proud of her than ever.

After luncheon, Charley drew Nina aside, and said,—“I want you very much to see the new organ I have put up in the chapel. I have not forgotten, darling. Would you mind going there?”

She understood that he was thinking of the small grave, which she had hitherto shrunk

from visiting. "No, dear," she answered, with that deep steadfast look which always came into her eyes when she was serious. "I mind nothing when I think of you. There is no room left in my heart for sadness now."

As they entered the chapel some five or ten minutes later, Nina saw that many improvements had been made besides the introduction of the organ,—chiefly things she remembered having said in Charley's presence that she would like to have altered if she could, of such importance had her slightest wish ever been to him.

After a few minutes, she asked them if they would mind leaving her alone for a little while. Understanding her feelings, Charley proposed to Mr. Trevor that they should go down to the little hamlet below. He wanted to speak to some one about the fishing, but they would only be detained a short time. They had just reached the gate when he involuntarily turned back, and, re-entering the chapel, threw his arms around Nina, and whispered, as he pressed her closely to his heart,—“My own dearest one, I hardly like to leave you here alone, even for five minutes. But you will not be sad?”

"No," she answered. "Thoughts of the past bring scarcely any other feeling than one of thankfulness, when I see the way in which every trouble seems but to have been a step to this great happiness."

With one more fond embrace he left her. As soon as he was gone Nina knelt down for a few moments; then, leaving the chapel, went straight to the spot in which, four years before, she had looked for the grave of Sir William's mother, and where now there was a tiny green mound, with one single white rose-bush clinging to the cross at its head. She picked one bud, and put it, together with some daisies, in a small Prayer-Book she carried in her pocket; then, kneeling down, and leaning her head against the white marble, she thanked Heaven for the discipline of the past as much as for her present happiness, and asked for help in that unknown future which now appeared so bright, but which might bring troubles as great and as hard to bear as any she had known.

She might have remained thus about two minutes, when a rustling in the leaves, with which the ground was strewn, made her look up. She saw a shabby, haggard-looking man

coming towards her. "Please go away," she said, thinking it was a beggar; "I have no purse with me, or I would give you something."

He took no notice, but continued to approach the spot where she now stood, her figure drawn to its full height. "Did you hear what I told you?" she said. "This ground is private, and you might be taken up for trespassing. It is useless to try to intimidate me; I have not any money here."

"I ask for nothing," he said; "nothing but your pity," as he knelt at her feet, and kissed the hem of her habit, which trailed upon the ground.

She drew it away hastily, half-frightened. "My poor man! are you mad, that you behave in this way?"

"Mad! Ah, ah! I should think I was," he said, rising, and pushing back the hat and bandage which had hitherto concealed in a great measure his face; "but not so mad as to be ignorant that no one has a better right than I have to be here. Trespassing, indeed, when the whole place, every stick and stone in it, belongs to me if I choose to claim it! And

you, too, my lady, with all your pride and dainty ways, are bound to do my bidding, whatever it may be."

"Oh, Sir William!" said Nina, in a voice of agony. "Why have you risen from the grave to mock me? I am sure that you were dead."

"So you believed it, did you? Ha! Didn't we do it well, Jacques and I? Letters and papers, every one, they were all forgeries. But I did not mean to trouble you again," he said, sitting down on the grass, and beginning to whimper like a child. "I only wanted to see the place once more, and then go away. There they are," as steps were heard approaching; "they are on my track, with the Avenger for their leader; but I'll be their match yet; they needn't think to catch me." So saying, he got up, and, hurrying towards a small wood on the opposite side of the cemetery, disappeared amongst the trees.

When Mr. Trevor and Sir Charles reached the gate, Nina advanced two or three paces towards them, then suddenly, with a shriek, she fell forward. They both sprang to help her up, thinking her skirt must have got

beneath her feet, and caused her to stumble ; but when Charley tenderly raised the prostrate figure, they found she was in a swoon so deep and so like death, that they did not know what to think or do, for her very heart seemed to have stopped beating.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Wav'ring as winds the breath of fortune blows,
No power can turn it, or no prayers compose.

CHAUCER.

“Poor child,” said Mr. Trevor; “her feelings have been too much for her. As usual, she imagined herself stronger than she was. I think, Sir Charles, if you would allow one of those children in the cottage below to go to the house and order a carriage, it would be better to take her home at once.”

Charley, glad to do anything, started immediately in search of a messenger. He returned quickly, bringing with him some water. This was a welcome sight to Mr. Trevor, whose efforts to restore animation, by

loosening Nina's collar and chafing her hands, had completely failed. It was nearly half-an-hour before she began to show signs of returning consciousness. At length, with one or two gasping sobs, she opened her eyes, and, looking around with a terrified expression, clung to her father, saying, "Has he gone?"

"Who, darling? There is no one here whom you need fear."

"That dreadful man, who took my baby's life, and now is come to murder me! He is here—he is in the wood! Oh, father! Take me away, take me home,—anywhere that he cannot come."

Mr. Trevor did not attempt to reason with her, although he felt assured she was under a delusion. He blamed himself for having left her alone in this spot, where memory would be so likely to revive all the horrors of the past. Glad to see the carriage at last approaching, he led her towards it, Charley following in silence. She had not spoken to him once, and all his efforts to attract her attention only made her turn away shuddering. He, poor fellow, was cut to the heart by this inexplicable change in her bearing towards him. During

the whole of the drive, she would now and then start up, wild with fright, entreating her father to make the man drive faster, that they might not be overtaken. Then she would sink back, with both hands pressed to her temples, moaning out,—“Oh! my head, my head!”—while her face, which had so lately been deadly pale, was now flushed with the deep crimson of fever.

When they reached the Vicarage, Sir Charles said he would himself go on to Drawlingham in the carriage, and, if possible, bring back the doctor. His anxiety was too great to allow of his remaining in inaction. Alas! the visit of the physician only confirmed their worst fears. It was a case of brain-fever, brought on, he said, by some sudden excitement or nervous shock. She might possibly get over it, but everything depended upon perfect quiet combined with good nursing. This last she was sure to get. No hired services could be so tender or so skilful as Jane's. She loved Nina as though she were her own child, and would suffer no one but Janet to do a thing to help her.

Charley could not, would not go away. “It

was something," he said, "only to be near her,—to be under the same roof." All through the long hours of the night he sat in the drawing-room, listening to every sound, and anxiously awaiting each report which Mr. Trevor brought from the sick-room, where Jane and Janet watched that one so dear to all, who but lately was so bright, but now was tossing in all the ravings of the wildest delirium. Only he, who but yesterday had filled her every thought, seemed now to be quite forgotten amidst the terrible images that crowded on her mind, each one more horrible than the last, and Charley's name she did not mention once; while he, poor fellow, sat below, thinking over all that he had said and done, wondering if he had ever uttered a word to pain her, and wishing, oh! so fervently, that he might be near her. But Mr. Trevor would not hear of it; the only hope lay in perfect stillness, and he himself never entered the room. "My dear fellow," he said, full of thought for others, as usual, "I am afraid you are grieving over her manner to you this afternoon. But you need not, for it is nearly always the case in fever, that those we love

best are the ones we, in our delirium, seem to turn against."

It was towards morning when Janet, entering the room, said that Nina, being thoroughly exhausted, had at last become quiet, and they hoped she might sleep. She had come down to ask her father if he would not have some coffee, she was sure he must need it.

"No, my dear," he said, "there is something I want much more, and that is, that you should go and lie down. You are looking ill yourself."

"No," she replied, trying to smile, but with very poor success; and, suddenly bursting into tears, she laid her head on her father's shoulder. "I cannot rest till I know the danger is past. I have not been good to her, papa; I have not had kind feelings towards her sometimes. Oh! I wish I could die instead,—she is so much more wanted than I am."

"Don't, dear," said Mr. Trevor. "You are not yourself, or you would not talk so."

Charley went to the table, and, pouring out a glass of wine, brought it to her. She started as she saw him, having in her agitation quite forgotten his presence; but she drank the wine,

and was at last persuaded to go and get the repose she so sorely stood in need of.

Two or three days passed—days of careful watching and never ceasing anxiety. Every hour their feelings alternated between hope and fear—the violent delirium and convulsive paroxysms were now succeeded by a stupor scarcely less alarming. On the evening of the third day, Janet sat alone by her sister's bedside. She had insisted upon Jane's going to get some rest, and she felt very lonely and sad, and nervous too. "What if Nina were to wake up in one of her wild fits of delirium!" She rose, and drew aside the curtain. No, there was no fear of that; but, as she gazed upon the helpless form, a new idea took possession of her. Suppose Nina were to die while she was watching there alone! The thought was too terrible. She put her face close to her sister's. Yes, she breathed still, though very faintly—it was enough to re-assure her. Returning to the table, she took up a locket which Nina had always worn; gazing earnestly at the miniature it contained, tears filled her eyes. "Heaven grant, for your sake, dear Charley, that she may recover—that I may never, after

this lesson, have any more thoughts of selfishness or foolish jealousy! You are worthy of her, and she must be given back to you, for it would break your heart to lose her."

How long she had stood thus, she scarcely knew, when a slight sound in the bed attracted her attention. Going to her sister's side, she found her with eyes wide open, and the light of reason once more shining in them. "Don't speak, dear," she said, "till you have had something," as she saw Nina's lips moving in the vain effort to make herself heard. She evidently understood what Janet said, for she lay like a child, obediently swallowing what was given to her, till at last, even while the food was at her lips, her eyelids dropped, and she fell into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"You must begone," said Death, "these walks are mine."
Love wept, and spread his sheeny wings for flight,
Yet ere he parted said, "This hour is thine,
* * * * *
But I shall reign for ever over all."

TENNYSON.

FROM this time the improvement, though very slow, was yet evident, and the hope, which had so flickered, nay, almost died out in their hearts, began to glow with a steady flame. So great had been the violence of the fever, however, that it was not until some weeks had elapsed that they ventured to let her leave her bed. Janet, on the first day of her sister's rising, having settled her comfortably on the couch, went down to get some wine; in a few minutes she returned with it, bringing, at the same time, a bunch of fragrant autumn violets. "Sir Charles brought these from Rookwood for you himself, dear Nina," she said, fetching a vase, and putting them on a small table by the side of the couch. "Now I want you to look your best," she continued, as she

straightened the folds of the soft, white dressing-gown Nina wore, and threw over her a bright rug, "for, of course, he is waiting to see you. Now I will go and fetch him; but, remember, if you over-excite yourself, it is the last visit I shall allow."

When Charley entered, Janet did not follow; it was more than she could bear to witness the meeting, and, besides, it would be kinder to leave them alone. For some moments not a sound was heard, the hearts of both were too full for utterance. Nina's lips moved once or twice, as though she would have spoken, but feared to break the spell of perfect happiness which his presence threw over her. She lay, holding both his hands pressed closely to her heart, as if she could never bear to part from him again. At length, she said, in a low voice,—“Charley, dear, will you sit on this chair at my side, and listen to what I have to say? Do you remember how you talked to me long ago of those between whose souls existed the most perfect sympathy and strongest love, and yet who were never suffered in this world to be all in all to each other? You spoke of a future, in which they might meet and live

together for ever, in such happiness as this world, at its best, could never give. These things seem so much more real to me now than they did before. I feel so *sure* now of our union in that blessed eternity, that the present parting is robbed of half its sting."

"But why talk of parting, my darling? You will live many years yet; and if a husband's deepest devotion and most tender care can do aught to obliterate the past, you *know* they will be yours. God grant that when we die it may be together; I could not live without you!"

"It is worse than that, my dearest Charley. I scarcely know how to tell you. That poor, unhappy man, your cousin, is still alive; the having seen him was no delusion of mine." And then she related, word for word, all that had passed in the cemetery. "I remember everything," she said, "until I saw you coming; after that all is a blank."

Charley turned deadly pale. "Oh, Nina! my only love! my all but wife! It is too dreadful to be true."

Nina could not answer. The little strength she had summoned to her aid was quite gone,

and she lay looking as white and still as a marble statue, save that two large tears rolled from beneath her eyelids; for she was not insensible, only utterly exhausted. Turning round in search of something to revive her, Charley saw Janet, who had just entered the room. She had come, thinking the excitement might be too much for Nina, and that it was time the interview should terminate.

"I am going," he said, seeming to divine her thoughts, as he bent over Nina in a last farewell. Summoning all her remaining strength, she threw one arm around his neck, whispering,—“Dearest, it is not for long. I know we shall meet again where nothing can come between us; and where, however much we love, it will be thought no sin.” With one long, parting embrace, he rushed from the room, and three minutes’ later his horse’s hoofs were heard going at full speed down the drive.

During the whole of that day Nina continued calm, but so weak that it was only by the constant use of stimulants life was kept in her at all. Towards evening she fell into a doze, and Janet left her in their nurse’s charge

while she went to make tea for her father. They had only just sat down at the table, when Mr. Trevor was called out of the room. "A messenger from Rookwood," the servant said. "What could it be?" Janet thought. She waited some minutes, expecting her father's return; but at last, unable any longer to restrain her impatience, she followed him into the hall. Mr. Trevor stood listening, with an expression of the utmost consternation, to Henry, Sir Charles's favourite man, who was recounting something which evidently affected him, for every now and then he turned away, brushing his sleeve across his eyes. Janet only caught these words, "It is all over, sir, by this time; for Dr. Blake said he could not last more than an hour long—" He stopped short at the sight of Janet.

"Do not send me away, papa," she said. "I know something dreadful has happened, but I cannot bear suspense."

"It is, indeed, most awful," he replied. "Sir Charles has fallen from his horse and injured his spine; I fear, from Henry's account, fatally. He seems to have been riding at a hard gallop, and carelessly, when the animal

stumbled and threw him. It was returning from here this morning."

Only in a change of colour did Janet show what she felt; her self-control was always great; and, turning to Henry, she asked, with a trembling lip but calm voice,—“Are you sure there is no hope? What did Dr. Blake say?”

“He says, miss, it is impossible my poor master can live through the night. He was quite insensible when we took him up, and has been so ever since.”

“Poor, poor Nina!” said Janet, in all her unselfishness, thinking only of her sister. “What shall we do, papa?”

“She is so weak,” answered Mr. Trevor, “that I am afraid it might have the very worst effect if she were told of such a thing now. We must consult Dr. Blake when he comes to-morrow.”

When Janet, shortly after, went upstairs, she found Nina still sleeping, and with a more peaceful and happy expression on her face than she had known for a long time. Janet’s heart was filled with sadness as she contrasted this calm slumber with the painful realities to which her sister must sooner or later wake.

Knowing nothing of what had passed between Charley and Nina this morning, she was not aware that in that sad "Good-bye" both had been so convinced that they were lost to each other for ever in this world, that death itself could add no sting to their grief. She dreaded the having to break the sad news to her sister; and, making some excuse to send Jane away, she fell on her knees, praying for help and guidance and strength to bear the double burden thus laid upon her.

"Janet, is that you?" It was Nina's voice. "What time is it? Have I been long asleep?"

"Some hours, dear. Do you feel stronger? Are you the better for your rest?"

"I think so, I have been so happy. Oh, Janet! I have had such a bright dream: at first I was very wretched. I dreamt I was wandering in some dark, dismal wood, where the very air I breathed seemed but to stifle me. I could not see my way, and every moment stumbled over stones, while thorns and briars tore my limbs. There was no hand to support, no voice to cheer and comfort me. I tried to bear it patiently, but at last I fell, and had not strength to raise myself again. I lay there

moaning, 'Is there no one to aid me?—no power in heaven or earth to remove this desolation? Oh, Charley! my first, my last, my only love! How much longer must we be apart?' Then I heard a voice saying, 'It is enough; her hour of trial is past; she shall have no more pain, no more sorrow or suffering.' Oh! what a calm fell on my spirit at the sound of those sweet tones. Bright angels enfolded me in their downy wings, and bore me to a place more beautiful than I can describe. And, oh, papa!" she said, turning her eyes towards her father, who had entered the room some minutes before, "he was there; I thought he came to meet us, and was so glad—oh! so happy to be with me again. Dear Charley!" For some moments she was silent; at length, in a voice only just audible, she said, "Father, will you lift me up? I am so tired, and I can't breathe when I am lying down. I wish little Elsie would say that hymn of hers about the angels."

Janet went immediately in search of the child. As soon as she was left alone with her father, Nina tried, in her old caressing manner, to stroke his cheek, but had not strength to raise her hand.

"I am not fit for much," she said. "Dear papa, I had so many things to say to you, but I cannot think of them now. I hope you will not grieve much when I am gone; that is the only thought which troubles me."

Mr. Trevor could not speak; but as she lay in his arms, he kissed over and over again the pale brow and the steadfast eyes, which already seemed to have in them a light not of this world.

"Elsie, darling," she said, as the little one with wondering looks came close to the bedside, "sing me those words,—

"They'll bear me gently, softly—"

The child went on,—

"With loving care, most sweet,
And lay me down in safety
Among the flowers of Heaven,
That never die or fade;
And far more lovely music
Than here on earth is made."

"Listen," said Nina. "I am sure I hear it now; such perfect music. I think it is the angels singing. Oh, papa! it is all so bright; it is like that happy dream."

A gleam of sunshine lighted up her whole face, and, with one gentle, fluttering sigh, she ceased to breathe: her loving, trusting, child-like spirit, lulled to its rest by the sweet voices of angels. No more bitter tears could roll from those closed eyes—no more sighs would heave that gentle breast,—nothing but unfading, cloudless joy for ever.

Janet placed within the crossed hands the bunch of violets Charley had but this morning brought; then, kissing the lifeless but still most lovely face, amid fast-falling tears she murmured,—“In death they were not divided.”

Mr. Trevor took her hand, and gently led her away, and both felt, in the midst of their deep sorrow, that He who had deprived them of that one, so dearly loved, had, even in this, “done all things well.”

THE END.

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"Leaving subjects worn threadbare, or touching them lightly, he analyses in a way no one else has done the Spanish character. He has looked beneath the surface, and he has seen for himself some of their institutions. His sketch of domestic life in Spain is beyond praise. . . . We have rarely been able to recommend a book more cordially. It has not a dull page, and no one can rise from its perusal without learning more about Spain than he ever learnt by the most diligent perusal of political letters from that ill-fated country. For our author (whose style is good, method of arrangement lucid, and sympathies warm) not only is a keen observer of things below the surface, but has the rare art of imparting his information in a form alike pleasant and intelligible. The book deserves to be a great success."—*John Bull*.

"An amount of really valuable information respecting the lower classes of Spaniards, their daily life and conversation, and ways of looking at things, such as few writers have given us. . . . The second portion of the book, which is devoted to the mining or 'Black Country' of Spain, contains some capital sketches of character both of the Spanish miners and of the Welsh and Cornish overseers and mining captains. . . . In conclusion, we may remark that it is a work that should be read by everyone interested in Spain, and in the moral and political crisis through which she has been and still is passing."—*The Field*.

Samuel Tinsley, 10, Southampton Street, Strand.





